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WAGING WORD WARS:
A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE PATTERNS OF NORSE MASCULINITY
PRESENTED THROUGH *MANNAFNAÐR* IN THE ICELANDIC SAGAS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

The Department of Geography & Anthropology

By

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ABSTRACT

The *mannjafnaðr* is a verbal dueling competition containing boasts and insults through which Norse men compare their achievements and exploits against those of other men in bids to prove themselves more honorable in the eyes of the Norse community. This thesis examines the structure, content, and themes of the *mannjafnaðr* presented in the *Morkinskinna*, *Magnussona*, *Brennu-Njals*, and the *Orvar-Oddr* sagas as manifestations of the Norse conception of masculinity. My analysis reveals that these encounters are highly structured and provide interactants opportunities to evaluate adherence to culturally dictated strictures of honor – their own and their opponents’. Through a complex discourse structure, Norse men evaluate their honor through five categories of actions: physicality, social duties, sexual irregularity, appearance, and the violation of alimentary taboos. The Norse do not value these categories equally. The frequency of each category’s usage in the verbal confrontation reveals their hierarchy. Analysis of the themes in each *mannjafnaðr* reveals the debates that Norse men had about the valuation of the types of actions and situations through which they perform their masculinity.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines both insults and boasts within the context of verbal dueling in medieval Iceland, focusing on exchanges of boasts and insults. Medieval Iceland delighted in word play and word games. Word play and verbal skill garner honor for the individual who engages them successfully in competition in the same manner that physical prowess and martial victory do for the warrior (Hollander 1962: 42, Turville-Petre 1964: 110, Davidson 1993: 9). Older scholarship argues that in medieval Iceland, two forms of verbal dueling emerge as prominent. These two forms are often referred to by the Icelandic words: *mannjafnaðr* (“man-comparison”) and *senna* (“truth-quarrel”). The *mannjafnaðr* is a boasting contest, and the *senna* is an insult duel. When discussed in broad, general terms, scholars group both under the Old English term *flyting* to highlight the similarity of both duels – the exhibition of bids to prove manliness by the combatants through the references to specific deeds or misdeeds performed; such broad comparisons often occur when contextualizing the Icelandic duels within the broader spectrum of Medieval Germanic verbal contests (Clover 1980, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2001). The use of Icelandic terminology is an academic distinction that does not occur in the saga texts. The sagas only name *mannjafnaðr* as a specific form of verbal dueling occurring when males alone compete in the contest; *senna*, by contrast, is a legal term that finds no representation in the sagas in relation to the form of verbal dueling examined herein. While often humorous to read, both genres are taken with lethal seriousness by persons in the world of the presented duel (Clover 1980, Parks 1986).

Previous scholarship identifies the *mannjafnaðr* and the *senna* as separate verbal dueling forms where combatants compare themselves against each other in linguistic skill and against

an unstated but generally accepted social fiction, differing in social context (Clover 1980, Parks 1986:440, Swenson 1991: 41). In the *mannjafnaðr* form, opponents may know each other; however, one duelist is often a travelling hero who utilizes this verbal dueling form to prove manliness (Clover 1980: 450). In this duel, combatants attempt to prove themselves through a positive comparison of the self to an unstated social ideal. The combatants are always male, and they are of roughly equal social status (Beowulf and Unferð, Odin and Thor). The speech form often resembles the following translation of boast of Thor's from the myth *Harbarðsjoð*:

I slew the fierce giant Thjazi,
And I hurled the eyes of Alvaldi's son
To the hot heavens above;
These are the mightiest marks of my deeds,
That all men since can see.
What, Harbarth, did you do during this time?¹

The form, as can clearly be seen, is ego-centric; until the final line, which challenges Thor's competitor to answer with greater feats than those just recounted, the focus of each sentence is upon Thor. The form, therefore, is "I have done X, Y, and Z [implied: which we all know is proper manly behavior]. And while I did all of these things what have you done?" Literary sources suggest that the Norse often used this form of verbal dueling for entertainment purposes during a session of heavy drinking (Clover 1980: 447-448). However, this combination of intoxication, boasts, and verbal challenges may— but not always — lead to physical violence as the verbally bested party attempts to prove his worthiness at the physical level. Two other possible outcomes exist: a third party may intervene to stop the violence or the defeated may accept submission gracefully (Bax and Padmos 1983: 171, Swenson 1991: 44-45).

¹ This quote is my translation of the *Harbarðsjoð Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, edited by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn.

The *senna* form, however, presents a very different form of verbal dueling. The contestants in this duel may be either male or female, more than two competitors, and are often of very different social statuses. During *senna*, the quarrelers attempt to prove manliness through a negative comparison of the other to the unstated social ideal. The specificity of the insults hurled requires that all combatants know (or at the very least know of) each other. The form often resembles the following translated example of an insult that Loki hurls at Thor in the *Lokasenna*:

Of that which you have done on the East-road
You should say no more to men;
You, mighty one, did hide in the thumb of a glove,
And there forgot you were Thor.²

The form articulates that “You have done X, Y, and Z, [implied: which we all know to be improper behavior; therefore I am manlier than you are].” A general feature of the *senna* is that a person of low(er) status humiliates one or more persons of high(er) status (Sørensen 1983:38). While the insults hurled during a *senna* are very specific in nature, they fall into certain categories: cowardice, failure to display familial honor/loyalty, failure to properly perform one’s social responsibilities, alimentary taboo violations, and sexual irregularity. (Clover 1980, Sørensen 1983, Karras 1992). A *senna* may, and often does, include a *nið* insult, which either may relate to an actual charge of passive homosexuality or a symbolic insult of powerlessness (Sørensen 1983: 37-38, Clover 1993: 377). The performance involves threats and then ends in violence, as the losing party attempts to prove worthiness through the only method of recourse left: martial prowess (Sørensen 1983: 32). While the *mannjafnaðr*

² This quote is my translation of the *Lokasenna* *Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, edited by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn.

provides a forum through which heroes can prove their manly worth, the *senna* serves as a means to gain social standing through public victory in a verbal duel and as a place to air social grievances, where the socially marginal could claim superiority over the elite (Clover 1980: 458, Sørensen 1983: 38, Bax and Padmos 1983: 153, Parks 1990).

Several sagas refer to the verbal duels they present as *mannjafnaðr*, but scholars impose the name *senna* on insult duels. The only verbal duel in the Icelandic corpus bearing the name of *senna* is the mythological poem *Lokasenna* where the trickster Loki verbally assaults the Norse pantheon. Clover (1980) argues that scholars should use the generic English term *flyting* to discuss the complexity and variety of Norse verbal dueling. Similarly, the use of the Icelandic categories imposes a modern, analytic line of separation that appears to not have been present in the minds of the saga authors (Hallberg 1974: 103-104, Steblin-Kamenskij 1975: 187-191). This category of error is inherent in attempts to translate ancient texts “We might as well be prepared to face the fact that we are in a different world of thought, the patterns of which do not always fit our cherished terms” (Lord 1960: 101).

Swenson (1991) argues that if scholars abandon using the Icelandic terms, they must be replaced with some other terminology. She argues that the *mannjafnaðr* and the *senna* forms differ functionally in the minds of the saga authors and in Norse society. The former seeks to define a man’s position within society, and the latter differentiates the categories of “hero” and “monster” that allows the *mannjafnaðr* to function (56). I recognize that both forms of strategy are employed to best an opponent in verbal combat. However, I disagree that the results of both arbitrarily created forms present a functional difference. In a *mannjafnaðr*, the duelists compare themselves against one another in an effort to gain social honor by aligning the self

with the ideal. In a *senna*, the duelists compare themselves against one another in an effort to gain social honor by separating the opponent from the social ideal. The outcome is the same in both cases: the victor gains honor at the expense of his opponent(s). I argue that instead of two distinct forms, Norse verbal duelists incorporate a plethora of rhetorical weapons as they compete verbally to prove themselves as men who are manly and honorable.

My discourse analysis reveals Icelandic verbal dueling practice complexities and patterns obscured by earlier academic techniques including the academic use of *mannjafnaðr* and *senna* as categories for speech events. Through my research and analysis I will argue that verbal dueling is a complex set of forms and practices that characters in Icelandic sagas creatively manipulated as they struggled against each other for power and proof of manliness. With regards to terminology, I follow Harris who argues that the critic and scholar must take into account both analytic and ethnic systems and their evolution.

Even if his critical discourse relies heavily on an analytic system in, for example, seeking to “read” a particular work against a generic pattern, it would be of first importance to know what were the governing generic influences on the authors in ethnic perspective. But these ethnic generic influences cannot be adequately studied in the lexicon alone and, for a dead culture, can never be fully understood. If the analytic view of Old Icelandic prose genres is in a sense anachronistic and sometimes metaphorical, it is well to repeat that the reconstructed ethnic view will always be incomplete and there (because the object of study is a system) also to some extent false (1975: 431).

In more contemporary terms, Harris argues for a culturally-informed discourse analysis approach to the translation and interpretation of ancient texts. This is the process I have selected to discuss the verbal duels presented in four Icelandic sagas: the *Brennu-Njals Saga*, the *Örvar-Oddr Saga*, the *Magnussona Saga* (contained within the *Heimskringla*), and the *Morkinskinda*. Because all the verbal duels I examine include only male combatants, I will use

the term *mannjafnaðr* as a categorical name for the specific category of verbal contestation in which only male opponents boast about their own deeds and insult those of their opponents. The second part of this chapter focuses on my theory and methodology; I also justify my selection of texts

I begin the process of my analysis by discussing the linguistic form and structure of Norse verbal dueling in general and Icelandic verbal dueling in particular. I then move to the socially calibrated importance of the categories of boast and insult used by men during the verbal dueling process as they seek to prove both their masculinity through positive and negative comparisons of themselves and their opponents (respectively) with the unstated social ideal. These categories are derived from analysis of my data set; my findings in this regard are similar to previous scholarship (Clover 1980, Swenson 1991, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2001). My findings, however, provide a ranking of importance for these categories based upon the frequency of use within my data set.

An extensive corpus of literature on verbal dueling in its diverse incarnations across numerous cultures and times exists (Dondore 1930, Abrahams 1962, Edwards 1979). While they may be spoken or sung, ludic or serious, all verbal duels present verbal battles for social prestige as combatants wage word wars to prove their own manliness through various displays of verbal acumen (Parks 1990). Verbal duels of any form serve a multitude of purposes, ranging from academic inquiry, entertainment, establishing legal or political superiority, and the production/presentation of selfhood in a social context (Ong 1982, Parks 1986). The plethora of these genres includes:

- Riddle contests where the competitors risk their lives in proving who has the greater knowledge base (Hollander 1962: 42)
- Boast contests where opponents recount their deeds (either good deeds or even drinking misadventures) in a bid to one-up those around them
- The rappers' practice of "dissin'" another rappers skills in such a way as to display and promote one's as superior (Keyes 1993)
- Insult contests where competitors either ritualistically or realistically hurl negative comments at their opponents (Abrahams 1962, Edwards 1979)
- Debates (political, legal, or forensic competitions) where contestants argue logically and rationally that their opinion is superior to their opponents

Verbal duels of all genres serve various functions ranging from entertainment to information dissemination to social control. The crucial glue shared among all varieties of verbal dueling is that verbal acumen holds a place in increasing honor, social capital, or possibly economic capital for the one with greater skill.

While the actual performance of a medieval Icelandic verbal duel is impossible to witness and record for obvious reasons of temporal displacement, I do have access to dramatizations of these duels as presented in the Icelandic sagas. *Saga* is Old Norse for "story," and the word's derivation from *segja* ("to say") speaks to the oral beginnings of the saga-telling tradition (Tucker 1989: 2-3). The Icelandic sagas are a unique literary form in medieval Europe. They are anonymous prose narratives depicting the lives of purportedly (and often actually) real individuals, often those of low social standing. The saga writing period began around 1190 AD; it ended within fifty years of Iceland becoming a dependent colony of Norway in 1262. The

narratives relate events occurring during the settlement period between the years AD 980 and AD 1030 (Byock 1984: 153). The sagas we have now are written texts that many believe developed from a rich oral tradition of storytelling (Bugge 1909: 250, Tucker 1989: 4).

While all sagas share overlapping commonalities, scholars differentiate seven different types of sagas: the *Islendingasogur* (Icelandic Family Sagas), the *Konungasogur* (Sagas of the Norwegian Kings), the *Fornaldarsogur* (Mythic-Heroic Sagas of “Olden Times”), the *Biskupasogur* (The Sagas of the Bishops), the *Heilagramannasogur* (Sagas of the Saints), the *Postolasogur* (The Sagas of the Apostles), and the *Riddarasogur* (translations of French courtly literature). Of these categories, the last four have influences drawn from foreign works; the religious sagas draw from Latin works on the lives of the saints and apostles, and the *Riddarasogur* draw on various genres of courtly and chivalric literature from other European countries (Tucker 1989: 4, Palsson 1989: 28). The sagas concerning us are the *Islendingasogur*, the *Fornaldarsogur*, and the *Konungasogur*, which are unique to Commonwealth Era Iceland, starkly realistic in their description of places, people and events, and lacking in the overt moralizing features of other literary forms from within and without the Norse world (Bugge, 1909: 249, Byock 1984: 153-154, Tucker 1989: 5).

The Icelandic sagas, to which I shall refer from this point forward simply as “the sagas,” can be described as a blend of naturalistic fiction and historical fiction because of their depictions of the Icelandic landscape, social traditions, and heroes modeled on “real personages of the not-too-distant past” (Turner 1985: 78-79, Palsson 1989: 28). The sagas may also be described as literary portraiture, word-paintings depicting the characters and idiosyncrasies of those personages involved (Andersson 2006: 60). Byock states that saga-tellers and saga-writers

worked with a tradition of known characters, settings, and events from which they drew as the basis for their narratives, altering the focus of the events, adding new themes and judgments, and removing what they did not wish to include to create new renditions that retained the essence of the event embellished with different personalities (2001: 143-145). They do not follow the Aristotelian narrative structure of definite beginning, middle, and end where all actions bring about the inevitable and satisfying resolution (Andersson 1967: 28); instead they focus on feuds and conflict resolution patterns specific to Commonwealth Era Iceland that reflect the interests and anxieties of the Icelanders (Byock 1982: 24-25). Carol Clover notes that this focus leads the sagas to become “acentric,” drifting away from the hero (or titular personage) and spending significant quantities of time discussing the actions of a brother, uncle, or adversary (1982: 19).

In initial scholarship on the Icelandic sagas, the primary debate centered upon whether or not the sagas were faithful renditions of oral narratives (“Freeprosists”) or consciously constructed literary works (“Bookprosists”) (this debate is summarized in Byock 1984). After briefly discussing these two views, Victor Turner concludes that the sagas are “clearly master-products of Icelandic society, which from the very beginning contained a relatively high proportion of literate men,” and can be regarded as “authentic expressions of Icelandic culture” (1985: 80). Being the longest, most complex, and most favored of the family sagas, the *Brennu-Njal’s Saga* took center stage in this debate. The Freeprosists argued that the repetition of form and phrase in the *Brennu-Njal’s Saga* strongly suggested an oral root, while the Bookprosists contended that the size, complexity, and unity of the text pointed to a written origin. The Bookprosists, however, conceded the point that the events in the *Brennu-Njal’s*

Saga could have existed as a “loosely grouped cycle of smaller narrative units relating to a common theme” (Cook 1997: vii, Tucker 1989:17-18). Zoe Borovsky concludes that they are “literary products” that straddle the border between “oral history” and “historical fiction” (1999: 6-7). The Icelandic sagas contain what Walter Ong calls “oral residue” (1982: 36-57), which, like the personal narratives examined by Tannen (1982), involves the incorporation of the techniques of written language use to display integration and unity of narrative with the techniques of oral speech (repetition, syntactic parallelism, and vivid descriptions) to create audience involvement.

I concur with Borovsky’s evaluation that the sagas fall into a liminal area between oral and written narrative, because they display characteristics of both. While they cannot be considered faithful representations of oral narratives, these written manuscripts contain much oral residue that clearly links these narratives to an oral tradition. Like Turner, I argue that while we may never know the true origin of these thick, rich narratives, their continual study affords us insight into a culture of which we can gather no direct knowledge.

In discussing the Icelandic sagas as written texts of an oral-traditional literature, I draw upon the works of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord. In his article, “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral-Verse Making I: Homer and Homeric Style,” Parry outlines three stylistic characteristics of oral style presented in the written Homeric texts: (1) the presence of a large number of formulae; (2) the presence of “themes”; and (3) the presence of “unperiodic enjambement” (Parry 1930: 80). Parry, whom Lord critiques as writing extensively on formula but writing little on enjambement and theme (Lord 1991: 26), defines formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea (Parry

1930: 80).” Lord broadens this idea in his discussion of “theme” by stating that a theme (in oral literature) gains its distinctive nature through expression with “more or less the same words every time the singer or storyteller uses it. It is a repeated *passage* rather than a repeated subject (Lord 1991: 27).” While focusing on Slavic epic-singers, Lord mentions that this “oral residue” finds its way into the written literature of medieval Germanic cultures (1991: 20). Lord argues elsewhere that, as literacy in the Middle Ages was rare outside of clerical circles, much of the vernacular literature continued “for a long time in the oral traditional formulaic style; writing was at first only a surface phenomenon (1995: 17).” In his paper, “*þættir* and Oral Performance,” John Lindow discusses how various Icelandic sagas incorporate descriptions of the performance of *þættir*, smaller narratives and/or poems, and from these scenarios we can gain insight into the nature and form of skald-craft, storytelling and song-singing (Lindow 1995: 185).

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In investigating the power-plays present in Icelandic verbal dueling, I turn to the theoretical work on power as articulated by Foucault (1980, 1982). For Foucault, power functions in a triangle with truth and right; he considers that rules of right “provide a formal delimitation of power;” power produces and transmits the “effects of truth,” and these effects reproduce power (1980:93). Therefore, power does not exist statically in persons or institutions independently; its omnipresence exists in a “network of relations, always in tension, always in movement” (1975: 31, 1980: 142). Power does not exist without discursive features and pronouncements accompanying its exercise (i.e. legal sentencing or declarations of insanity). Persons are not “powerful” or “powerless;” instead they exist at the nexus of a multitude of

power relations exercised in their pronouncements and how those exercising power use it to dominate others (1980: 95-96, 1982: 780).

The truth and meaning that a given society produces is rooted in struggle (1980: 131-133).

When a person exercises power to dominate another, the one being dominated has two options: submit or resist. For Foucault, the interplay between submission and resistance creates an economy of power that can be understood through the methods of resistance. Investigating insanity or illegality, he argues, provides a path to learning what a society interprets as sanity and legality respectively. All forms of resistance share commonalities. Forms of resistance are immediate (criticizing instances of power closest to those affected); they attack all effects of power that separate the individual from others and the community challenges the effects of power linked to knowledge; they display competence of the social system and societal norms; and they centralize questions of identity (1982: 780-781).

Therefore, if discursive power meets resistance, the discursive exercise of power must clash with discursive resistance. The nature of this resistance, however, must be defined by what it resists. As I will demonstrate, the sagas contain many kinds of resistance behaviors.

It is here that Foucault's work proves invaluable to the study of Icelandic verbal dueling. As the verbal duelists depicted in the sagas seek to prove manliness, to exercise a power that separates the self from all that is unfit and unacceptable, they function as an extension of what Foucault describes as a "regime of truth": a circular relation between systems of power and the truth and meaning they produce and by which they are sustained (1980: 133). Verbal duels then function to establish dominance through the articulation of a "true discourse" that either positively associates the self (thereby disassociating the other) or negatively associates the

other (thereby positively aligning the self) with the social ideal (1980: 93-94). As dueling involves struggle, a verbal duel represents a (possibly violent) dialogue between discourses of power and of resistance. Combatants have the option either to submit and accept the accusation that they are socially unfit or to resist it by proving manliness through their own verbal assaults, and should one party deem it necessary, through physical confrontation.

It is important to stress that the sagas are not histories. Even when they recount stories about persons who actually lived and about events that actually occurred, these are dramatic retellings told for metaphorical value and not historical, factual accuracy. The saga narratives fall into a category variably called social memory, collective memory, cultural memory, and public memory. Social memory involves remembering and interpreting the past in ways that make the remembered past meaningful to the present (Lowenthal 1985, Young 1993, DeLyser 2003). The factuality of the events described in social memory narratives is less important than the meaning that the telling of those narratives has for the present. Such a telling of the past, as Dydia DeLyser articulates, “animates the way we make sense of the present” (886). Alaric Hall postulates that the sagas depict then-contemporary Icelandic historians’ “attitudes to their past, with implications for how they used their history to construct their present” (2005: 1).

To exemplify how social memory narratives work within a given present, let us briefly examine the famous story of George Washington and the cherry tree. While unproven historically and, most likely, therefore, apocryphal in nature, the tale consists of a young George Washington chopping down a cherry tree. His father confronts him and the young boy admits his actions saying, “I cannot tell a lie.” Because elementary school teachers often repeat this story to school children generation after generation, the narrative speaks to the American

belief that honesty, honor, and integrity are important characteristics for all citizens to possess. Because the story involves one of our Founding Fathers and our first president, the story communicates the importance of these values to the American political experience. We, as Americans, expect that our leaders possess and display these same characteristics and that we will hold them accountable should they fail to do so.

Such narratives about historical figures communicate the metaphorical relevance of the personages and events of the past to those in a given present, thus linking different temporal and social contexts through the meaning given to the former by the latter. While factual truth may be absent, the metaphorical truths contained within the narratives speak to the reality of the world in which the narrators and their audience live. Analysis of these narratives grants access to the values and beliefs meaningful to a society. In the case of the Icelandic sagas, the present is a society in transition: Christianity was replacing the traditional Norse polytheism; some *goðar* (regional priest-chieftains) attempted to consolidate power in themselves; and Iceland moved from being an independent commonwealth to being a dependent colony of Norway (Hastrup 1985: 9-11, Durrenberger 1989: 239). Therefore, the sagas present the past through the lens of memory, depicting an Iceland when, as opposed to the present as interpreted by the narrators, men were honorable and brave. In similar fashion, contemporary Icelandic obituary writing serves to connect the memories of the recently departed with the whole of Iceland and its history through recollections of socially valued character traits, commonly enjoyed events, and genealogy that for many, even young, readers who do not know the deceased, tell about the past and illuminate relationships in the present (Koester 1995: 159-160).

The verbal duels I have chosen to analyze represent a pattern of verbal contestation that did occur among Icelandic males during the Middle Ages for the purposes of proving masculinity, manliness, and superiority to other men so as to gain honor, esteem, and power in the community. In analyzing the forms and methods by which individuals claim and resist claims of manliness in Icelandic verbal duels, I will examine the structure, content, and language of the verbal duels recorded in the *Brennu-Njals Saga*, the *Örvar-Odds Saga*, the *Magnussona Saga* (contained within the *Heimskringla*), and the *Morkinskinna*. In choosing the verbal duels to analyze, I looked primarily for interactivity. Insulting speech and boasting are common features in the Icelandic sagas, but interactive verbal duels are not. Some sagas, like the *Bandamana* and the *Eyrbyggja*, feature an insult section where one person verbally assaults one or more individuals – none of whom respond, save with silence, to the accusations made against them. Such a verbal performance is interesting in and of itself; however it holds more in common with what we refer to as a roast than with a verbal duel. My definition of the term verbal duel focuses upon the word duel's combative origin and history and thus requires the active engagement of both parties to create a struggle of wills to survive, of wills to power, and of wills to truth. Each of the duels chosen contains two or more verbal combatants striving against an opponent in this quest for verbal, and social, superiority.

The chosen duels all feature only male combatants. Female/female verbal duels exist, such as the insult contest between Hallgerður and Bergþóra at a party hosted by the latter, which starts the central feud in the *Brennu-Njals saga*, moving the action toward her son Skarphéðinn's verbal duel against a series of chieftains at the *alþing*. Additionally, several male-female duels exist, such as those in the *Ketils saga hængs* and the *Hjalmðés saga ok Olvis*.

Male-female duels always end with the male defeating the female, thus reinforcing the Norse patriarchy (Clover 1980: 449). As anonymous male authors most likely produced the saga manuscripts, the fact that male duelists always defeat female duelists is unsurprising, as is the case that most of the verbal duels feature only male combatants. A unique feature of male-only duels is the possible inclusion of the *níð* insult, which relates either to an actual charge of passive homosexuality or a symbolic metaphor of powerlessness. The *níð* accusation, which I will more fully discuss later, held such power in the minds of Norse males that the only recourse to disprove it lay in physical violence (Sørensen 1983: 37-38, Clover 1993: 377). My use of male/male verbal duels will allow me to analyze and discuss the nature of Icelandic masculinity as expressed through boasts of proper manly behavior and accusations of unmanly behavior contained within the verbal duels.

Description and depth were two interlinked concepts that factored into my choices. Not all sagas that discuss verbal dueling relate full versions of the speech event. Many sagas only relate that the event occurred or present a small fragment of that event. Carol Clover remarks that sagas often either reference that a verbal duel occurred or supply a single insult or boast to suggest the tone of the duel, but most sagas do not describe the performance of the duel in any detail (1980: 449). Depending upon the context of each duel chosen, the narrative description varies, but the depth and length depicts the logical movement from the instigating event to the immediate and later consequences. Both the *Magnussona* and the *Morkinskinna* present the same verbal duel differently, the latter presenting the duel in greater detail with slightly different narration than the former.

Another feature that I looked for in selecting my texts is variety. While there are commonalities to each of the contests chosen, I chose those that displayed the breadth of verbal dueling as presented in the sagas. Thus, each has a unique feature that the others do not possess. The duel in the *Brennu-Njals* occurs at the *Alþing* and is presented in a picaresque manner as Skarp-heðinn Njalsson verbally contends against five chieftains on the eve of his murder trial. Its final episode moves from insult to boast, against the pattern discussed by previous literature (Clover 1980, Parks 1986, Swenson 1991). The verbal duel in the *Örvar-Oddr Saga* occurs during a drinking contest: the combatants deliver their insults and boasts in verse form instead of the usual prosaic form of reported speech. The stakes in this instance include both entertainment and life, as two of Odd's companions bet their heads against a twelve-ounce bracelet that Odd can out-drink and out-perform his two opponents. While most verbal duels occur between people of unequal social standing (Sørensen 1983: 38), the duel presented in the *Magnussona* and the *Morkinskinna* depict two brothers, both kings, striving to entertain the people attending what is described as a silent drinking party. Insults and boasts intermingle within both incarnations, allowing for an examination of proper masculine behavior through both acceptable and unacceptable deeds. I acknowledge that three of the four duels presented occur at what can loosely be described as a "drinking party." This commonality represents what is available in the Icelandic literature and the more common setting for verbal dueling in the broader context of Germanic literature (Clover 1980, Parks 1986).

My method of analysis began with translating the verbal dueling sections of the sagas from the Old Norse to English. Translating the texts proved necessary, as while searching for verbal duels, I found that many of the sagas have not been fully translated into English, and of

those that have, very few have been translated more recently than the 1960s. Comparatively, my translations are more literal than the literary translations produced by others.

Translation is not an easy process. The process of translation often contains unconscious, as well as conscious, power plays between the language (and culture) of the translator and the language (and culture) of the translated text (Robyns 1994, France 2005). Clem Robyns notes how translation strategies run the gamut from “the ‘faithful’ translation and the complete transformation of a text or textual element” (1994: 407). Similarly, Peter France claims that “since each language constructs the world in a different way, any translation is bound to force the text into the disfiguring disguise of an alien idiom.” France discusses how that for many reviewers and readers, the “ideal translation” presents the illusion of intimacy with the original (2005: 258-259). France’s central argument is that in literary translation, the translator, functioning similarly to an orator, positions himself or herself between a subject (the text) and a public (the readership) and incorporates a plethora of rhetorical strategies to express the words and ideas of the subject (2005: 261).

My translations attempt to walk the line between literal re-presentation and creative transformation. I began by examining other translations and used them as guides for my own translations. Specifically, I examined Magnusson and Palsson’s edition of the *Brennu-Njals*, Andersson and Gade’s edition of the *Morkinskinna*, Hollander’s edition of the *Heimskringla*, and Edwards and Palsson’s edition of the *Örvar-Oddr*. While all of these were good translations, I could not be certain that the discursive features I noted in the translations were present in the original language texts. Therefore, to be certain that the features I noticed were present in the original and not a function of translator creativity, I turned to editions of the Old Norse texts to

seek the answers through producing my own translations. Two of the features I sought to trace to the original are the use of metaphor and of understatement. Norse verbal duels incorporate applied eloquence, where words become weapons, and verbal dexterity proves equal in importance to the knowledge of your deeds and those of your opponent(s). Another aspect of the original texts requiring close attention is the number of verbs that can be, and often are, translated broadly as “to say.” Each verb, however, has a series of connotations and shades of meaning that differentiate its proper usage from other “to speak” verbs. I have standardized the translations of these verbs so as to bring to light their different meanings (See Appendix B).

After translating the verbal dueling sections, I re-transcribed the texts into a style that more closely resembles a theatrical script than a prose narrative (See Appendix A). I chose this format because it allows me to easily see the speech acts that are often placed within and undifferentiated from the larger prose sections. This proves important as medieval manuscripts do not feature modern punctuation and separation of reported speech from narration. Modern editions in the Old Norse language often incorporate some form resembling modern grammatical conventions of punctuation and paragraph division in their presentation of the sagas. I present the narrative prose in single-spaced, block paragraphs, flush against the left margin with a double space between paragraphs. When a character speaks, the speaker’s name and any relevant narration, such as “Asgrim replied,” are also flush against the left margin, with the reported speech centered, and double-spaced below that line. And while my intent was not to make a visual pun on the “centrality” of the speech in my analysis of verbal dueling, I cannot avoid noting the humorous symbolism in this presentation format.

Two additional aspects of my transcription bear noting. First, I assigned line numbers to each of my texts, and the line numbers start at “1” at the beginning of each page. Examples from my texts will be cited as follows: (Saga Name Abbreviation:Page:Lines). I abbreviate the saga names in the following manner: *Brennu-Njals* – B-N, *Örvar-Oddr* – O-O, *Magnussona* – Mag, and *Morkinskinna* – Mork. Second, while I presented the example within the body text of my thesis, in the following chapters I will separate the examples from the text using a blocked format to increase readability. I italicize the Norse text and place my text beneath it. The example of Skarp-heðinn’s comment to Thorkel above would be presented thus:

Er þér og nær að stanga úr tönnum þér rassgarnarendann merarinnar er þú ást áður.

You should clean the sausage from your teeth you sucked out of a mare’s ass before you came here (B-N: 8:6-7).

Having translated and transcribed my texts, I then analyzed the structure and content of the verbal duels. In seeking to examine how duelists wage word wars in their bids to exercise power or to resist power through claims and counterclaims related to manliness, I asked three questions of my data: What do the duelists say? How do they say it? What do those statements mean for Icelandic men during the saga-telling age? To answer these questions, I analyzed the claims made by each duelist against his opponent as culturally-laden metaphors (Quinn 2005:49) where specific actions and social violations became representations of larger categories of behaviors believed to demonstrate manliness.

While coding and performing a preliminary analysis on my data, I realized that the traditional method of categorizing boasts and insults in Norse verbal dueling needed modification. The traditional scholarly categorization; as used by Clover (1980), Sørensen (1983), Swenson (1991), and Karras (1992); presents five categories: physical appearance,

physicality, sexual irregularity, performance of or failure to perform ascribed social functions, and violation of alimentary taboos. While those reported speech acts provide cultural information about proper manly behavior, the infrequency of their appearance in the sagas I examine suggests they are of secondary importance to physicality, sexual deviance, and the performance of one's social duties. Another feature that revealed itself was that each verbal duel contains its own unique theme or themes that patterns in the choices of utterances reveal.

CHAPTER II: THE FORM OF NORSE VERBAL DUELING

Verbal dueling occurs in all genres of medieval Icelandic literature through episodes both mythological and heroic as well as across Germanic language and literature. A verbal duel may stand alone as the primary event in the narrative, such as in the *Lokasenna* or the *Harbarðsjoð*, or it may be embedded within a larger narrative framework as verbal duels often do within the sagas and many of the heroic lays such as the *Helgaviða Hundingsbana II*. Even when part of a larger narrative structure, the authors routinely incorporate certain distinctive discursive features to signal the beginning and end of the event and characterize its internal structure. This is unsurprising as verbal duels themselves are highly stylized combative speech events which include many formulaic expressions. Before beginning my analysis of the content of the verbal duels and what they tell of Norse masculinity, I will briefly discuss the formal structure of Icelandic verbal duels, specifically the *mannjafnaðr*.

SETTING

Two kinds of physical settings exist for performing *mannjafnaðr* in the Icelandic literature: one outdoors and the other indoors. In the outdoor setting, a river or the space between armies assembled for battle often separates the duelists (Phillpotts 1920: 158). While none of the texts I analyze feature an outdoor verbal duel, such duels can be found in *Thorgils saga* and in heroic and mythic lays such as *Helgaviða Hundingsbana II* and *Harbarðsjoð*, respectively. In the broader Germanic context, outdoor verbal duels occur in the *Nibelungenleid* (the “ferocious ferryman”) and in the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Battle of Maldon*.

Indoor *mannjafnaðr* performances often occur at a formal gathering, such as a royal court (*Örvar-Oddr saga*), the *Alþing*, the annual general assembly, (*Brennu-Njals saga*), or at a party

(*Magnussona* and *Morkinskinna*). Other sagas, such as the *Bandamana*, as well as the Eddic poem *Lokasenna* also feature indoor verbal dueling. *Beowulf*, the Saxon epic, also features an indoor verbal duel as Beowulf proves his manliness in verbal contestation against *Unferþ* at King Hrothgar's mead hall.

Aside from broadening the context to show that verbal duels in both these settings occur throughout the body of Icelandic literature and across the broader spectrum of Germanic narratives, I mention the *Beowulf* episode to draw attention to a unique feature of indoor verbal dueling: the presence of drinking. Clover (1980), Parks (1986) and Swenson (1991: 44) note that drinking is almost universally present when verbal duels occur to the constituting, "a literary reflex of what we assume to have been actual banquet practice in the Germanic world" (Clover 1980: 447-448).

Indoor *mannjafnaðr* performances may occur indoors in a private house, a mead hall, a king's court, and an *Alðing* booth of the men from a particular region. Because all of these locations can be understood as the host's residence, the possibility exists that some aspect of Norse hospitality or a violation of hospitable norms may occur and serve as an instigating event for conflict. Watkins argues that hospitality violations lead to physical violence (1995: 405-406), and Clover discusses the prevalence of literary examples where a visitor to a residence is exposed to mockery and insults as the newcomer seeks to establish identity and worth in the presence of those in the hall (1980: 450). Thorkell's belligerent diatribe to Asgrim at the beginning of the sixth episode in the *Brennu-Njals* and the arrogant, anti-social actions of the followers of King Sigurd that offend the host to the point that he asks King Eystein to rebuke his

brother constitute violations of host-guest hospitality that serve as instigating events for verbal duels.

Regardless of the specific location for verbal dueling, all verbal duels are public events. The combatants seek to prove themselves not only to each other but also to the broader audience witnessing the competition. This court of public opinion (Parks 1986: 451, Swenson 1991: 46, Wickham 1998: 7-8) varies in both size and composition. In the *Brennu-Njals*, the *goði*, their respective retinues, and the contingent accompanying Skarp-heðinn form the audience who will judge the worth of the duelists. For Odd the Great's contest against Sjölf and Sigurðr in *Örvar-Oddr* saga, King' Herrauðr's court and Odd's men judge the worth of the combatants. When the brother kings Eysteinn and Sigurd contend at a party, the party-goers, comprised of the retinues of both kings as well as their hosts, judge the contest.

The importance of this judgment by the court of public opinion finds expression in the texts of the verbal duels. King Eysteinn states after suggesting to Sigurðr that they compare their worth to entertain the party guests:

Ef við verþom eigi sattir a. þ æro nu vitrir menn hia at scynia hvat við roþomc.

If we cannot agree, there are wise men present to judge what we say (Mork: 1:37).

The narrator of the *Örvar-Oddr* informs us through a prose interjection in the middle of the contest:

ok þótti mönnum þetta mikil skemmtan, ok gáfu allir hljóð til þessa.

Everybody thought this great entertainment and was giving it a good hearing (O-O: 4:19-20).

COMBATANTS

In the broader corpus of Germanic literature, the combatants in verbal duels display a great variance. Gods, mythical beings such as giants and dwarves, heroes of legend, kings, retainers, *goði*, freemen/farmers, women, and outlaws all engage in verbal dueling for various purposes. As I have stated previously, the texts I examine in this thesis contain only male combatants, and as they are drawn from the sagas, the duelists are heroes of legend, kings, retainers, *goði*, freemen/farmers, and outlaws. The combatants in verbal duels may oppose each other in single combat (*Magnussona*, *Morkinskinna*), or in a sequential series of one-on-one duels in *Brennu-Njals*); however the *Örvar-Oddr* presents a two-on-one duel, which is a less common type within the literary corpus (Clover 1980: 450).

The identity of these men, their relative status, and their relationship to one another contribute to the undertaking of verbal dueling as a means of proving their masculinity and manliness. Through the latter, I will address the former. They may know each other, as King Eysteinn and King Sigurd, being brothers and sons of King Magnus, do (*Magnussona* and *Morkinskinna*). In the *Örvar-Oddr* and the *Brennu-Njals*, the duelists have some knowledge of their opponents, but they do not know them on the level that that Eysteinn and Sigurd know each other. This “knowledge of” one’s opponent arises from their reputations: people who have interacted with a person speak about that person’s deeds – both good and ill (Wickham 1998: 7-8). In the *Brennu-Njals*, the narrator recounts how everyone at the *Alþing* knew of Skarp-heðinn’s deeds to the point that they recognized him on sight and judged him accordingly.

Hann var allra manna hermannlegastur og kenndu því hann allir ósénn.

He looked the consummate warrior, and everyone knew him at first sight even if they had never before seen him (B-N: 7:11-12).

The *goði* who verbally spar with Skarp-heðinn know of him from his many deeds, including the killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-*goði* – the specific charge that brought him to seek their aid before his trial. This quest for legal assistance causes him to enter their booths, and once inside, the *goði* initiate *mannjafnaðr* with him. Sjölf and Sigurðr know the heroic reputation Odd the Great (*Örvar-Oddr*) gained after he left his home, but they do not immediately recognize him because of the bark-tunic he wears to disguise himself, and because he has not revealed his noble ancestry. As I will show later, the level of knowledge one has about one's opponent influences certain discursive practices in the verbal duel.

STAKES

The Icelandic performance of *mannjafnaðr* conforms to the basic formation of competition in that two or more entities, be they individuals or teams, actively oppose each other for some prize. The stakes and the prize vary from duel to duel, but the combatants always seek to gain honor and esteem amongst those judging the duel (Clover 1980: 444-445). Focusing his study on sexual defamation, Sørensen argues that in a society with an aggressive masculine ethic, aligning oneself with the honorable masculine ideal was considered to be virtuous (1983: 21, 24). A man's reputation and all the social and economic benefits associated with high esteem, depended heavily on his alignment with the masculine ideal (Wickham 1998: 7-8).

However, each verbal duel has its own immediate and particular stakes, which range from simple entertainment to gaining support in a legal endeavor to life and death. The primary stakes, as defined by Eysteinn's instigating statements, motivating the verbal duel between Eystein and Sigurðr, is to entertain party goers. Eystein begins by telling his brother

þó eru menn hljóðir ; hitt er ǫlsiðr meiri, at menn geri sér gleði; fám oss ǫlteiti nǫkkura; mun þá enn á rætask um gaman manna.

Why are people silent? It is more common in drinking parties that people are merry, so let us provide some entertainment over our ale, that will amuse people. (Mag: 1:8-9).

Life and death are the broad stakes for both Odd the Great and Skarp-heðinn Njalsson as they contend verbally against their respective opponents. Odd's own life is not in danger as he verbally spars with Sjolf and Sigurðr, but the lives of his two companions are at stake.

"Hér skulu vér veðja um," sagði Sjólfr, "ok munu vit leggja við hring þann, er stendr tólf aura, en þit skuluð leggja við höfuð ykkur."

"We'll have a bet on it," said Sjolf, "We may lay against your ring, which is worth twelve coins, and that shall lie against your two heads. (O-O: 1:38-43)

Skarp-heðinn Njalsson, about to stand trial for his killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-goði, faces a possible sentence of full outlawry, which is equivalent to a death sentence. Being outlawed separates the convicted from all social interaction; Norse law removes him from human status and redefines him as a wolf. As a non-human animal, the outlaw can be killed on sight by anyone without any compensatory payment made to his family. The wolf metaphor for the outlaw is common to Germanic law and dates back as far as Proto Indo-European (Sørensen 1983: 16-17, Watkins 1995: 406).

STRUCTURE

Norse verbal duels are highly structured speech acts (Clover 1980, Swenson 1991, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). Although the form through which each duel is depicted varies, they typically contain one or more repeated elements that stylistically differentiate it from the surrounding narrative (Clover 1980: 446). Three of the four duels I examine display one or more repeated elements. The *Brennu-Njals* depicts a picaresque verbal duel in which Skarp-

heðinn Njalsson competes verbally against a succession of *goði* by moving from booth to booth at the *Alðing*. This section presents a repeated overall structure that begins with some variant of “They went to the booth of...” and concludes with a question and answer exchange where Skarp-heðinn asks where the contingent’s next destination is and Asgrim answers. Each iteration also repeats standard greetings and offering of hospitality as well as a repeated inquiry into the identity of Skarp-heðinn whereby each *goðar* initiates the verbal duel, conforming to a performance pattern common across the Germanic world wherein a newcomer to a hall is subjected to inquiry and mockery in order to prove his worthiness to enter. The following example between Snorri and Skarp-heðinn illustrates this initial sequence:

Snorri mælti: "Hver er sá maður er fjórir ganga fyrri, fólleitur og skarpleitur og glottir við tönn og hefir öxi reidda um öxl?"
"Héðinn heiti eg," segir hann, "en sumir menn kalla mig Skarphéðinn öllu nafni eða hvað vilt þú fleira til mín tala?"

Snorri proclaimed: “Who is that man, fifth in the line, the pale, sharp-featured man with a smirk on his face and an axe on his shoulder?”
“My name is Heðinn,” he said, “but some call me Skarp-heðinn in full. Have you anything else to say to me?” (B-N: 3:38-4:3)

Snorri, as do all the *goðar*, knows who Skarp-heðinn is before he names himself, thus making this a formulaic opening. We know that Skarp-heðinn’s reputation precedes him, because the narrator informs us of that fact before he and his comrades enter Thorkell’s booth.

Hann var allra manna hermannlegastur og kenndu því hann allir ósénn.

He looked the consummate warrior, and everyone knew him at first sight even if they had never before seen him (B-N: 7:11-12).

Knowing that everyone recognized Skarp-heðinn on sight suggests that the opening question of the *goðar* served as a gambit, an easily-counteracted opening that afforded Skarp-heðinn the opportunity to prove his worth through verbal performance.

Within the overall structure of the *mannjafnaðr*, lie the individual utterances of the combatants as they vie against each other in a word war to prove their own masculinity and superiority. While each unique utterance relates either to a specific category or multiple categories of proper/improper behavior, a generalized form of argumentation reveals itself through the utterances and the patterns of turn-taking. With combat as the underlying metaphor, Norse verbal dueling performs similarly to a debate with the broadly generalized formulaic sequence of Claim – Defense (optional) – Counterclaim (Clover 1980: 452, Swenson 1991: 52, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 77). To illustrate, I present the following exchange from the *Morkinskinna*.

Sigurðr konungr melti. Þat etla ec E. konungr at ec mon vera maþr stercari oc syndr betr. Sva er þat s. E. konungr. Ec em maþr hagari oc teflig hneftafl betr. Era þat mina vert en afl þitt.

King Sigurðr proclaimed, “I believe, King Eysteinn, that I am stronger and a better swimmer.

King Eysteinn said, “That is true, but I am more skilled and better at board games, and that is worth as much as your strength (Mork: 1:39-2:2).

In this example, Sigurðr makes the Claim: “I am stronger and a better swimmer,” which entails the unstated inference behind it – that such physical prowess makes him manlier than his brother and, consequently, the better king (Swenson 1991: 44-45). Eysteinn follows with the Defense “That is true”, a concessive clause that does not dispute his brother’s Claim, but like a parry, brushes the attack aside before his Counterclaim that he is skilled at board games, evidence of social skills and mental prowess that prove beneficial for kings, which he values as

being equivalent to his brother's strength (Clover 1980: 452)³. That the interpretation of each Claim/Counterclaim may or may not be stated demands a reminder that the veracity of the claimed event is never argued. The issue argued is always the interpretation of the action in terms of its worthiness and manliness. These evaluations form the core of the dispute. In other words, the facts of events are not disputed, but the interpretations and implications of them are (Parks 1982: 450, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 77).

Another characteristic structural feature of the *mannjafnaðr* is the frequent use of syntactic parallelism, which further reveals the highly stylized nature of the exchange. The parallelisms extend to the interactional and semantic realms, including questions and answer pairings as well as symmetrical reasoning (Clover 1980:453). The *Magnussona* saga displays both of these clearly in the following exchange between the brother kings (bold emphasis mine).

*Þa svarar Sigurðr konungr: **mantu eigi** þat, ere k braut þik a bak, ef ek vilda, ok vartu vetri ellri.*

*Þa segir Eysteinn konungr: **eigi man** ek hitt siðr, er þu fekt eigi leikit þat, er mjukleikr var i.*

Then asked King Sigurðr: “**Don’t you remember** that I was always able to throw you when we wrestled, although you are a year older?”

Then said King Eystein: “**Rather I remember** that you were not so good at the games which require agility” (Mag:1:21-25).

The parallel form repeated abstracts to: “Then asked King Sigurðr: ‘Do you remember that...’” and “Then said King Eysteinn: ‘But I remember that...’”

Similarly, in the *Örvar-Oddr* saga, parallelisms occur in the rhetorical formulation of one combatant’s verse and his opponent’s response verse where the response parallels the structure of the attack as the following exchange between Sjölf and Odd exemplifies.

³ I want to note that the *Örvar-Oddr* omits the Defense clause and uses a sequence of Claim – Counterclaim.

Sjolf:

*Oddr, vart eigi
á Atalsfjalli,
þá er fenloga
fengit höfðum;
vér berserki
binda gerðum,
þá var af kappi
konungs lið drepit*

Sjolf:

Odd, you were not
On Atalsfell
When we won
Shining gold.
The berserks,
We bound them,
There was a champion
Of the king's host slain.

Odd:

*Sjólf, vart eigi,
þar er sjá máttum
brynjur manna
blóði þvegnar;
hrukku oddar
í hringserkjum,
en þú höll konungs
heldr kannaðir.*

Odd:

Sjolf, you were not
There when we
Watched the mail-coats
Washing in blood.
Spear-points explored
In the ring-mail;
While you would rather get to know
The king's hall. (O-O:4:23-42).

Both turns in this round begin with a variation of the formulaic phrase [Name] *vart eigi* { *á*, *þar*, *ut* } ([Name], you were not {at, there, when}).

The *Örvar-Oddr* saga, like many other indoor *mannjafnaðr* performances depicts a verbal duel and drinking contest, wherein the patterned structure of ritual drinking behavior parallels that of the verbal duel. Each round involves one contender handing a beer-filled horn to his opponent, directing either a boast or an insult to him, and the drinking of the horn(s) by the opponent. Unlike the three other sagas I examine, the contestants in the *Örvar-Oddr* deliver their boasts and insults through poetry adding another performative aspect to the enactment of *mannjafnaðr*. Within this contest, the formulaic phrase [Name] *vart eigi þar* (“[Name], you were not there”), or a close variant, is repeated twelve times over a series of seventeen boasts/insults. Structurally, it serves as a discourse marker of turn-taking. It also serves to

articulate the contrast between the speaker's praise-worthy behavior and his adversary's failure to have performed glorious deeds (Clover 1980: 456-457, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 75), as displayed in the following turn by Sjolfr.

*Oddr, vart eigi
á Atalsfjalli,
þá er fenloga
fengit höfðum;
vér berserki
binda gerðum,
þá var af kappi
konungs lið drepit.*

Odd, you were not
On Atalsfell
When we won
Shining gold.
The berserks,
We bound them,
And slew many of the king's men.
(O-O: 4:23-31)

Beginning with the formulaic phrase, Sjolfr separates his opponent (Odd) from the honorable action of participating in victorious battles (*Oddr, vart eigi / á Atalsfjalli*) while aligning himself with those actions through the use of the first person plural verbs, which place him in the midst of the honorable events of the battle.

The *Morkinskinna* presents its repetition in the final speech of King Eystein. After acknowledging that he has no deeds to compare with his younger brother's military exploits in the Holy Land, Eystein lists the deeds he has done at home to better his people. He argues that these twelve deeds make him the better king, punctuating his speech four times with a variant "*mono þeir menn muna ... at Eystein Konungr hefir verit iNoregi*" (...and those people will remember that Eystein was king in Norway). As the following example illustrates, (emphasis mine):

*Norþr iVagom setta ec fiski manna vist. At fatokir menn metti norasc till ifs oc hialpar. Þar let ec oc kirkio reisa. Oc settag þar prest vist. Oc lagþag fe til kirkio gerþar. En naliga var aðr heipit. **Mono þeir menn muna at Eystein Konungr hefir verit iNoregi.***

North in Vagar I established a shelter for fishermen so that poor men could have aid and subsistence. I established a church construction fund, where the land had been as good

as pagan before that. **Those people will remember that King Eysteinn was in Norway** (Mork: 2:41-44).

Eysteinn repeats a similar phrase four times in his final turn to punctuate the value of the twelve projects he undertook at home; his argument in this lengthy turn is that his actions at home, while they did not earn him as much personal honor as Sigurðr's exploits in the Crusades earned for him, prove more beneficial to the Norwegian people and, thus, are worthier of a king.

The examples presented above display some of the strategies that contestants in Norse verbal duels engage as they vie for supremacy in verbal combat. The rhetorical choices made, as Clover points out, represent applied eloquence, where words are "used as ammunition in verbal warfare" (1980: 452). Scholars have traced three possible outcomes of these word wars: actual violence, submission displayed through silence or – in rare occurrences – a third party steps in to act as mediator (Clover 1980: 447-448, Bax and Padmos 1983: 171, Parks 1986: 451-452, Swenson 1991: 44-45, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 77-78). That being said, all four verbal duels I examined conclude with one party submitting silently.

From the discourse structure, Norse verbal duels prove to be highly formulaic and stylized combative speech events. The event conforms to a turn-based, debate-style formula where combatants alternate boasting and insulting as they believe will provide them the most benefit. As the *Brennu-Njals* displays, the event may include a series of six variations of a structure wherein the Njalsson contingent travels to six booths in an attempt to elicit support during the upcoming trial. During the *mannjafnaðr* performance, adversaries repeat variations on stock phrases and parallel syntactic constructions to prove their manliness through recounting past deeds (or their opponent's misdeeds) and through their own verbal dexterity.

Traditional scholarship labels two distinct forms for boast-centered and the insult-centered verbal duels, the *mannjafnaðr* and the *senna* respectively; however, all verbal duels in my data set depict varying mixtures of boasts and insults, sometimes depicting both in a single turn by one duelist. Within the context of the Icelandic sagas, only the term *mannjafnaðr* (“man-comparison”) appears. *Senna* is a legal term for truth, appearing only once in relation to Norse verbal dueling as the title of the mythic poem the *Lokasenna*. That the texts, with one noted exception, do not term insult duels *senna*, suggests that the academic nomenclature might not be identical to that used by the Icelanders. As a result of this discrepancy, I term all Norse verbal duels with only male combatants as *mannjafnaðr*.

The discourse structure of verbal dueling presented in the Icelandic sagas is highly structured and turn-based, similar to a debate. The saga authors often signal the start of a verbal duel through repetition of phrases, sentences, or narrative structures. Within the duel, opponents may mimic syntactic forms, repeating phrases, grammatical structures, or utterances, as they shift rhetorical strategies in an attempt to best their adversary. The discursive structure of the utterances reveals a debate-style model of Claim – Defense (optional) – Counterclaim. As the model demonstrates, when a verbal duelist defends himself, the defense portion of his utterance is fronted. The fronting serves not to disprove the factuality of the event his opponent described but to parry and deflect the assault, softening the blow in a manner that argues that such deeds are either not as “worthy” and “manly” as his own deeds (in the case of a boast counterclaim) or not as “unworthy” or “unmanly” as those of his opponent (in the case of an insult counterclaim). Norse verbal duelists also incorporate understatement and metaphor, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, adding a subtext to analyze.

CHAPTER III: THE CONTENT OF VERBAL DUELING IN THE ICELANDIC SAGAS

In the previous chapter I examined the structure of Norse verbal dueling as presented in a sampling of *mannjafnaðr* from the Icelandic sagas. That examination revealed that these Norse verbal duels are highly structured, formal, public performances where two or more men actively debate. They strategically manipulate selected characteristic rhetorical strategies into their argument in order to boast about how their past deeds prove them to be manlier than those of their opponent(s), by aligning themselves with the culturally understood ideal of manly behavior. They harangue their opponent(s) through insulting their past failures to indicate how they have fallen short of the ideal. Settings, stakes, and strategies vary from duel to duel, but each party's goal is to gain social honor – and all the tangible and intangible benefits accompanying being an honored member of society – at the expense of his opponent(s).

In this chapter, I will examine the content of the utterances in the *mannjafnaðr*. The examples will illustrate the five categories of utterances – boast, insult, threat, curse, and challenge – and the five categories of boast and insult – physicality, sexual irregularity, social duties, appearance, and violation of alimentary taboos – through which Norse men verbally contend against one another in their bids to prove which of them is the manlier. Categorizing and ranking/weighting the boasts and insults is not always as straightforward as may be expected, because some of the actions boasted about or insults hurled are delivered indirectly, relating to events depicted in other sagas or tales; therefore, interpretation of Norse verbal duels requires a measure of intertextual knowledge and familiarity with the broader genre of the sagas.

Icelandic discourse in the 13th Century uses the term *drengskapr* (courage, high-mindedness, manliness) to denote the complex of ideals and behaviors that comprise proper masculinity. Words in sagas and heroic poetry associated with the *drengskapr* complex are *hreysti* (prowess, valor), *karlmennska* (manhood, valor), *þrekbraðr* (strong, courageous), *vel talaðr* (well-spoken), *frækligr* (valiant, bold-looking), *vaskr* (valiant, manly), and *frændhollr* (faithful to one's kinsmen, pious). To be a man of worth (a *virðing*) required exemplifying this code of conduct by displaying the qualities listed above (Bauman 1986:140). Clearly from the concepts named above, Norse masculinity is not inherent in an individual, based on biological sex, or on privately performed deeds. Consequently, an exemplar of *drengskapr* performs his manliness through public actions that show him specifically to be dominant, courageous, eloquent, and honorable in his dealings with others. Making war and making *mannjafnaðr* provide two paths for gaining honor and performing masculinity.

Throughout the history of scholarship on Norse verbal dueling, researchers have noted complexity and variety in both form and utterance among and within the duels. However, academic tradition argues that there are two distinct types: the *mannjafnaðr* and the *senna*, representing the boast duel and the insult duel respectively (Bax and Padmos 1983, Parks 1986, Swenson 1991). While Clover (1980) argues that such distinctions are arbitrary, choosing instead to use the English term *flyting* to discuss all Germanic verbal duels, scholars have not followed suit, choosing to use the term *flyting* solely in discussions of verbal duels presented in British literature from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present (Parks 1986, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). Swenson argues against Clover's suggestion on the basis that the two genres of Norse verbal dueling differ functionally. The *mannjafnaðr*, she argues, defines a

man's position within society, and the *senna* differentiates the categories of "hero" and "monster" that allows the *mannjafnaðr* to function. Her analysis concludes that the differing functions prove that two distinct categories of Norse verbal dueling exist (1980: 56).

While I agree with the overall functions of the verbal duel that Swenson identifies, I disagree with her conclusion that two distinct types of verbal duels exist to carry out these functions. In a *mannjafnaðr*, the duelists compare themselves against one another in an effort to gain social honor by aligning the self with the ideal. In the *senna* form, the duelists compare themselves against one another in an effort to gain social honor by separating the opponent from the social ideal. The outcome is the same in both cases: the victor gains honor at the expense of his opponent(s). Additionally, verbal duels intermix the use of boasts and insults in different ratios preventing the finding of an ideal example of either form.

Norse verbal dueling is a complex performance genre, as evidenced through the diversity of presented duels in sagas and poetry. Through careful and detailed analysis of this structure, I have found no evidence to support the separation of Norse verbal duels into the two forms labeled by traditional scholarship on the subject. I argue that instead of two distinct forms, Norse verbal duelists strategically employ a characteristic range of rhetorical weapons in the performance of *mannjafnaðr* as they compete verbally to prove themselves as manly and honorable men.

Most studies of Norse verbal dueling have distinguished boasts from insults, but none have made distinctions within these categories regarding the power and significance these categories may hold in the Norse mind (Clover 1980, Parks 1986, Swenson 1991, Jucker and

Taavitsainen 2000). The lack of any such discussion in the literature is an omission that my research seeks to counter.

My analysis began by categorizing all the utterances according to the categories named by the academic literature that preceded my investigation: boast, insult, threat/challenge, and curse/vow (Clover 1980: 453, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 77). While aware of the generalized categories of boasts and insults (strength/weakness, bravery/cowardice, social responsibility/social irresponsibility, sexual irregularity or irresponsibility, appearance, and violation of alimentary taboos), I initially developed a set of ten categories: appearance, cowardice, family dealings, effeminacy, duties of a *goði* or a king, taboo violation, physical strength, martial skill, word/legal skill, and sexual impropriety. Realizing that many of these categories overlapped, I condensed the categories of boast and insult from ten to five. These categories are physicality (physical strength, martial skill, and cowardice), sexual irregularity (effeminacy and sexual impropriety), social duties (family dealings and duties of a *goði* or a king), appearance, and taboo violation.

Once I reassigned all the boasts and insults to those five categories, I quantified the number of boasts and insults in each category to create a hierarchy of valuation for the different categories of behavior as they relate to the conception of masculinity as depicted in the sagas. While all categories of boast/insult appear in the texts I analyze, three (physicality, sexual irregularity, and social duties) emerge as dominant through the increased frequency of their utterance compared to the other two (appearance and violation of alimentary taboos). The hierarchy in my data set aligns the arguments the verbal duelists incorporate in their performances with the Norse ideal of *drengskapr*, the conception of honor that includes valor,

valiant action, generosity, courageousness, being well-spoken, and being faithful to kin (Bauman 1986: 140). My examination will present a deeper and richer picture of how the Icelanders of the saga-writing period conceived of proper behavior for a Norse man.

PHYSICALITY

The most prominent category of boast and insult found within my data set is what I have termed "Physicality." Physicality includes many of the characteristics commonly and popularly associated with Norse masculinity: strength, agility, bravery, and skill in battle. Such qualities and abilities proved central to the Norse, who were feared raiders and also served as the elite Varangian Guard to various Byzantine emperors (Fortson 2010:372). As various scholars note, at the very least, a tenuous connection between *flyting* and fighting exists as a great boaster must then prove his abilities or a gravely insulted party may resort to physical prowess as a final counter (Clover 1980: 459, Parks 1986: 451, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2001: 77).

During boasting exchanges, the duelists brag about their strength and valorous deeds, arguing that such actions prove them to be manly. In the *Brennu-Njals*, the second round of the exchange between Skarp-heðinn and Thorkell provides a clear example of a complete boasting exchange.

Þá spratt Þorkell upp af mikilli reiði og þreif sax sitt og mælti: "Þetta sax fékk eg í Svíþjóðu og drap eg til hinn mesta kappu en síðan vó eg margan mann með. Og þegar er eg nær til þín skal eg reka það í gegnum þig og skalt þú það hafa fyrir fáyrði þín."

Skarphéðinn stóð með reidda öxina og glotti við og mælti: "Þessa öxi hafði eg í hendi þá er eg hljóp tólf álma yfir Markarfljót og vó eg Þráin Sigfússon og stóðu þeir átta fyrir og fékk engi þeirra fang á mér. Hefi eg og aldrei svo reitt vopn að manni að eigi hafi við komið."

Thorkell sprang to his feet in great anger, grabbed his short-sword, and proclaimed:

“This is the sword I got in Sweden and I killed a great warrior to get it, and since then I have used it to kill many more. And when I get to you I shall run you through with it and pay you back for your obscene words.”

Skarp-heðinn stood there with his axe raised and smirked and proclaimed:

“This is the axe I carried when I leapt twelve ells [18 feet] across the Markar River and killed Thrain Sigfusson while eight men stood by and could not touch me. And I have never raised a weapon against anyone and missed my mark. (B-N: 8:10-20)

This exchange clearly presents both duelists boasting about past victories in battle through the presentation of a weapon and stating either the victory that earned them the weapon (Thorkell) or the victories in battle they gained by using that weapon (both). Thorkell begins this turn with a boast about besting an unnamed but powerful champion in single combat; Skarp-heðinn counters and ups the ante by naming someone he bested in combat with his axe and drawing attention to the fact that he killed Thrain Sigfusson while outnumbered and still emerged unharmed. The advantage to naming a specific vanquished opponent is that the viewing public is likely to recognize the name and judge his relative worthiness; an anonymous opponent only carries the speaker’s evaluation of the vanquished foe’s abilities and worth.

Each of the sagas I examined has numerous examples of physicality boasts and insults. The majority of the utterances in the *Orvar-Odds Saga* relate to victory in battle. The discourse style that the duelists in this saga use to present their boasts and insults is distinctive from the other sagas in two significant respects. First, the duelists use verse to present their cases for their own superiority and/or their opponent(s)’ inferiority. Second, they often choose to begin their turns with a variation of the formulaic phrase “[Name], *vart eigi út...*” “[Name], you were not at...” While the former difference appears to be a stylistic choice to display the speaker’s verbal prowess and to enhance the entertainment factor for the audience present in the

narrative, the second choice clearly separates the speaker's opponent from the manly deed about to be recounted. In this example, as in the previous one from the *Brennu-Njals*, I build on the analysis of exchange structure from the previous chapter. As Sjolfr sings in the following verse:

*Oddr, vart eigi
á Atalsfjalli,
þá er fenloga
fengit höfðum;
vér berserki
binda gerðum,
þá var af kappi
konungs lið drepit.*

Odd, you were not
On Atalsfell
When we won
Shining gold.
The berserks,
We bound them,
And slew many of the king's men.
(O-O: 4:23-31)

After replying to Sjolfr's statement by accusing him of choosing to remain at home instead of venturing into battle, Odd takes aim at the silent Sigurðr by saying:

*Sigurðr, vart eigi,
þar er sex hruðum
hábyrðuð skip
fyr Hauksnesi;
vart ok eigi
vestr með Skolla,
þá er Engla gram
aldri næmdum.*

Sigurðr, you were not
Present when we
Cleared six high-decked ships
Off Hauksness;
And you were not around
In the west with Skolla,
It was there
We took the life of the Angles.
(O-O: 5:1-8)

Sjolfr contends that he is more manly than Odd because he took part in a battle that slew a king and captured a contingent of berserks – elite warriors in the Norse world. Odd counters this by recounting a naval battle in which he emerges victorious and then escalates the attack by naming a compatriot in a battle (Skolla) in which he too slew a king. I also find it noteworthy that this round marks a turning point in the contest: Sigurðr remained silent during his and Sjolfr's turn, and this is the last round in which either of them directs their verses at Odd.

The *Magnussona* and the *Morkinskinna* present two different accounts of a verbal duel between the sons of the late King Magnus of Norway: King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr. These two kings, who share co-rule of Norway, each draw upon their intimate knowledge of the other's past exploits and abilities. Eysteinn initiates the contest by publically proclaiming that both brothers are equal (Mag: 1: 17-20, Mork 1: 25-29); charging that "if we are equal, then why am I better than you at X?" Both brothers argue that their superiority at each "X" makes him the better man in general and the better king in particular than his supposedly equal brother. In the *Magnussona*, Sigurðr begins by asking of Eysteinn:

mantu eigi þat, er ek braut þik á bak, ef ek vilda, ok vartu vetri ellri.

Don't you remember that I was always able to throw you on your back as often as I wished, although you are a year older? (Mag: 1:22-23)

Here, Sigurðr argues that he is, and always has been, physically stronger than his older brother. By referencing the age difference in the two siblings, he emphasizes his prowess, because, in general, older boys should be stronger than younger boys, whereas in adult males of similar ages the difference is less obvious. In the *Morkinskinna*, Sigurðr states his superior physical prowess based upon knowledge that is common to all men in Norway.

þat etla ec mal manna at ec mona vera vapnfør eigi vedr en þu, oc at riða iturniment.

I believe that everyone knows me to be no less skilled with weapons than you, and no less good at tournaments (Mork: 2:6-7).

In this instance, Sigurðr trumps his brother's argument through pairing selective memory to current status and invokes the public judges "everyone knows" in support. Instead of saying he is better with weapons and at tournaments, he reminds his brother that all know he – the brother chosen to handle international affairs and fight in the Crusades – is "no less skilled" in

these areas than his older brother, who was chosen to remain at home and handle domestic affairs.

If strength, courage, and skill in battle are abilities/practices worthy of boasting about, then conversely weakness, cowardice, and avoidance of battle/lack of experience in battle provide fodder for insults to separate one's opponent from the ideal of the Norse man. Skarp-heðinn accuses Skapti Thoroddsson of cowardice by saying:

Gerðir þú þér þá koll og barst tjöru í höfuð þér. Síðan keyptir þú að þrælum að rísta upp jarðarmen og skreiðst þú þar undir um nóttina. Síðan fórst þú til Þórólfs Loftssonar á Eyrum og tók hann við þér og bar þig út í mjölsekkjum sínum.

That was the time you shaved your head and smeared it with tar, then you paid some slaves to raise up some turf and you crept beneath it for the night. Later you fled to Thorolf Loftsson of Eyra, and he took you in and then smuggled you out in his flour sacks. (B-N: 2:31-34).

Odd the Great accuses both Sjölf and Sigurðr of unmanliness for not venturing into battle on numerous occasions and choosing instead to remain at home and being seat-warmers. His first turn begins with such an insult.

*Þit skuluð hlýða
hróðri mínum,
Sigurðr ok Sjölf,
sessunautar,
ykkir ák gjalda
greypan verka,
hróðr harðsnúinn,
huglausum tveim.*

Now you shall hear
My praise-song,
Sigurðr and Sjölf,
Seat-warmers.
Time to repay you
For a slanderous work
of hard-twisted praise,
two heartless ones. (O-O: 3:1-8)

This very straightforward opening gambit presents Odd's thesis about why Sigurðr and Sjölf are less manly than he is: they are seat-warmers. Naming them seat-warmers implies that they keep their seats in the king's hall warm, because they remain inside instead of leaving the hall

to participate in battle. Later in the verbal duel, Odd charges Sjolfr specifically with preferring to remain at home than to enter into battle.

*Sjólfr, vart eigi,
þar er sjá máttum
brynjur manna
blóði þvegnar;
hrukku oddar
í hringserkjum,
en þú höll konungs
heldr kannaðir.*

Sjolfr, you were not
There when we
Watched the mail-coats
Washing in blood.
Spear-points explored
In the ring-mail;
While you would rather get to know
The king's hall. (O-O: 4:35-42).

As *drengskapr* incorporates courage and valliant actions (Bauman 1986:140), choosing to “get to know the king’s hall” instead of exploring the armor of one’s enemies with a spear point displays cowardice. Similarly, after boasting of his own exploits against the Saracens during the Crusades, Sigurðr reminds his older brother Eysteinn:

...en ek hygg, at eigi hafir þú enn hleypt heim-draganum

... and, I think that you have not stopped home-dragging. (Mag: 3:14-15).

Here, Sigurðr impugnes his brother’s reputation by calling attention to Eysteinn’s history of remaining at home and not venturing into battle.

SOCIAL DUTIES

A second category that appears frequently in my data set relates to the proper performance/non-performance of one’s social duties. Icelandic and Norwegian society (as well the rest of Medieval Europe) clearly demarcated gender roles and norms. Masculinity involved external-to-the-home affairs: sheep gathering, fishing, trade, war, transport, and legal/judicial events (Sørensen 1983: 21). This category includes all boasts/insults related to one’s function in society: public speaking, handling of disputes brought to one’s attention, avenging kinsmen,

and familial relations. Kinship and kin-interaction prove central to this category (Clover 1980: 453), but in the context of my data set, I define the importance of this category by saying that, for the Norse, to be a man means to conduct oneself with manly honor in all interpersonal public dealings.

Boasting about one's proper, or even excellent, handling of social duties occurs infrequently in my data set. The only sagas where any such boasts occur are the *Magnussona* and the *Morkinskinna*. In these sagas, the brother kings Eysteinn and Sigurðr seek to prove which of them is the better king; thus while the early rounds present physical exploits that are generally manly, Eysteinn quickly moves to boast about how he relates to the people he rules.

Kann ek ok miklu betr til laga en þú, ok svá hvat sem vit skulum tala, em ek miklu sléttorðari.

Also, I know more about the law than you, and whatever we should talk about, I speak more eloquently than you do. (Mag: 2:19-20)

He argues that he is the better king because he knows the law better than his brother, which allows him to better handle disputes between Norwegian citizens, and he speaks with more eloquence than his brother, which allows him to both convey his ideas and his decrees more clearly to his people and to be a better diplomat as the need arises. He concludes the *Morkinskinna* with a lengthy speech about his accomplishments that solved the problems of his subjects. While the entirety of the speech is in my appendix, I will present one section that exemplifies these boasts.

Hollina let ec oc gøra i Biorgyn oc Postola kirkio oc rið imilli. mono konungar muna þeir er sifar ero þettas verc. Michals kirkio let eco c gera. oc settac þar munclifi. Scipaþa ec logonom broþir. At hver metti hafa rettendi við anan. Oc ef þ aero halldin mon betr fara landzstiornin. Þeim lamtom hofom ver oc snvit undir þetta riki. Meir með bliðyrþom oc viti helldr en með aging. Nu er þetta smatt at telia en eigi veit ec vist at lanz bvino gegni

þetta ver e. se vhallqvemra en þott þu brytiþir blamenn fyrir en raga karll oc hrapapir þeim sv íhelviti.

I had a hall built in Bjorgvin, and the Church of the Apostles and a bridge between them. Later kings will remember this construction. I also built St. Michael's Church and established a monastery. I also established laws, brother, so that everyone might have justice in his dealings with others. If these are maintained, the land will be better governed. I have also brought Jamtaland into the kingdom – more with persuasion and wisdom rather than aggression. This does not amount to much, but I am not sure that it is less useful or beneficial for the people than your bludgeoning bludmen off to the devil and sending them to hell (Mork: 3:11-18).

Eysteinn's final sentences in this section sarcastically illuminate that while Sigurðr spent his time abroad at war; Eysteinn handled the various problems encountered in the daily lives of the Norwegian people (Clover 1980: 459). Through this sarcasm, Eysteinn tells his brother that in effect, while no one can doubt his courage, his exploits in the Holy Land have done little to benefit people in their distress at home. Through these and other such boasts, Eysteinn argues that he is the better king because his honorable and proper performance of the social duties assigned to his position provided more benefit to the people, who will remember him as the king of Norway, than his brother's involvement in the Crusades.

The social duties category contains a broader range of insults than it does boasts. For example, in my data set, no duelist boasts of being a "good father" or a "good son;" however, insulting one's opponent for failing to behave honorably toward his family occurs multiple times. My preliminary deduction is that proper behavior within the family is generally to be expected. Therefore, being a "good father" or a "good son" is not noteworthy and thus not boasted about as a characteristic that proves one's manliness. In the *Brennu-Njals*, many of Skarp-heðinn's insults fall into the social duties category. I will present two of his insults against Haf the Wealthy and Thorkell respectively.

Skarphéðinn mælti: "Hirð ekki þú það, mjólki þinn, hver eg er því að eg mun þora þar fram að ganga er þú situr fyrir og mundi eg allóhræddur þó að slíkir sveinar væru á götu minni. Er þér og skyldara að sækja Svanlaugu systur þína er Eydis járnsaxa og þau Steðjakollur tóku í braut úr híbýlum þínum og þorðir þú ekki að að hafa."

Never mind that, you milksop; I would dare to face you anywhere, and it would not frighten me in the least though there were more than one of your sort in my path. And you would be better employed to seek back your sister Svanlaug, whom Eydis Iron-Sword and Anvil-Head kidnapped from your home and you had not the courage to win her. (B-N: 5:1-5)

Hefir mig aldrei það hent að eg hafi kúgað föður minn og barist við hann sem þú gerðir við þinn föður.

I at least have never threatened my own father's life as you have, nor have I ever fought with has you did with your father. (B-N: 8:3-4).

Skarp-heðinn argues that Haf is unfit to call anyone else unmanly because he failed to avenge the kidnapping of his sister by Eydis Iron-Sword and Anvil-Head. His lack of action displays both cowardice, lack of familial loyalty, and disregard for familial honor; three character traits antithetical to the code of *drengskapr*. Thorkell, in fighting with and threatening to kill his father, escalates the expected occasional father-son disagreement to a socially unacceptable level. Skarp-heðinn's insults clearly show the broad spectrum of failings in familial relations (failing to avenge the capture of one's sister and fighting with/threatening one's father) that serve as insults against one's manliness.

Proper performance of social duties is of central concern in the *Magnussona* and the *Morkinskinna*. After Eysteinn turns the subject of their boasting from physical feats to the performance of social duties, Sigurðr responds to Eysteinn's claim of superior legal knowledge by saying:

Vera kann, at þú hafir numitfleiri logprettu, þvíat ek átta þá anna at starfa, en engi fryr þér slettmælis, en hit mæa margir, at þú sér eigi allfastorðr ok lítit mark sé, hverju þú heitr, mæilir eptir þeim, er þá er hjá, ok er þat ekki konungligt.

It may be that you know more law-quirks, for I have had something else to do; neither will any deny you a smooth tongue. But there are many who say that your words are not to be trusted; and what you promise is little to be regarded; and that you talk just according to what those who are about you say, which is not kingly. (Mag: 2:22-25, see Mork: 2:15-19 for a similar accusation).

Sigurðr argues that knowing the law is good, but he devalues Eysteinn's claim to superior legal knowledge by recasting his older brother's area of expertise as "law quirks." However, he contends that Eysteinn speaks falsely and that his words are dishonest and untrustworthy, which he states as being "not kingly."

Based upon the number of utterances in my data set, social duties forms the second most popular category of insult and boast through which Norse males seek to prove their manliness (see Appendix C). When considering insults alone, six different duelists accuse opponents of failing to properly perform their social duties. Only one duelist, Eysteinn, boasts about his accomplishments in this category. That he uses his accomplishments in this "domestic"/interpersonal field to best his younger brother is an unusual reversal of the more common outcome where the victory goes to the one with more "external"/martial accomplishments (Clover 1980: 456). That this reversal occurs when both duelists are kings suggests that kingly superiority has less to do with deeds that benefit the king personally than with deeds that benefit the nation as a whole.

SEXUAL IRREGULARITY

Sexual irregularity is the third most prominent category of boast and insult. Traditional scholarship defines this category as being comprised of insults about effeminacy, performing female functions (often related to milk production), castration, bestiality, sexual irresponsibility, incest, and passive homosexuality (Clover 1980: 453, Sørensen 1983: 20-21, Swenson 1991: 61).

To the Norse mind, preferring sexual exploits to martial exploits relates to both weakness and effeminacy, because sexual acts occur indoors, the domain of women, and because of the connection between sexual irresponsibility and moral irresponsibility. The logic is that if one prefers sexual conquests to martial conquests, then one prefers to remain indoors/at home instead of venturing valiantly into battle. If one remains indoors, in the “woman’s world,” then the perception is that one is too weak to perform manly actions in public, the “man’s world” (Sørensen 1983: 20).

Insulting a man’s sexuality is powerful and dangerous, as these insults may veer beyond the acceptable limits and enter the realm of *nið* (Clover 1980: 445). While not fully understood by scholars, the *nið* insult category comprises accusations of gross sexual deviancy that may either relate to literal events or to symbolic connotations of weakness or powerlessness (Sørensen 1983: 24-30, Swenson 1991: 60-61). This vaguely-defined insult category appears to have a powerful hold on the imagination of saga-era Iceland, and from their tales and the legal codes we can deduce that such insults had a similarly powerful hold in the broader context of the Norse worldview. As Sørensen discusses, both the Norwegian and Icelandic law codes from the Middle Ages, the *Gulathing* and the *Gragas* respectively, prohibit the uttering of such insults on penalty of full outlawry, and the strongly preferred recourse of the insulted party is blood vengeance (1983: 15-18). In my data set, Skarp-heðinn’s accusation that Thorkell prefers woman’s work to man’s work comes the closest to falling into the *nið* sub-category of sexual deviancy insult, and Thorkell responds to Skarp-heðinn’s taunts with a boast and a threat of violence.

Sexual irregularity is a complex category that intersects both physicality and social duties. This is unsurprising as sex is both a physical and a social act. My data set contains sexual insults, which comprise the full content of the utterances in this category. Sexual insults against men, as the *nið* complex illustrates are difficult to define in realistic terms. They may relate to actual events, or they may metaphorically accuse one man of being powerless and weak. Metaphorically, these insults may accuse a man of being submissive to another, accuse him of being weak and powerless, or accuse him of not being in control of himself, others, or a situation (Lattas 1990: 83, Gowing 1993: 4, Worman 2004: 2). While the meaning of the insult may not be sexual, the language used in the insult is clearly sexual. This category includes all insults that directly incorporate sexual language through which one man either literally accuses another man of sexual impropriety or metaphorically accuses him of weakness, powerlessness, or lack of control.

My data set also remains silent on any boasting in this category; none of my verbal duelists boast about their virility as being a central aspect of their manliness, choosing instead to use any deviation from the norm to separate their opponent(s) from being considered manly. This silence may suggest some type of avoidance taboo (possibly as simple as “We just do not talk about such things in public.”)

To exemplify the breadth of insults contained in the sexual irregularity category, I present two examples of insults delivered by Odd the Great in the *Orvar-Odds Saga* and one delivered by Skarp-heðinn in the *Brennu-Njals*. In each of these examples the speaker accuses his opponent(s) of effeminacy or preferring sexual exploits to being in battle. On his second turn, Odd the great drinks the two horns of ale presented to him and then sings the following verses:

*Slótt við meyjar
málþing, Sjólf,
meðan loga létum
leika um kynni;
unnum harðan
Hadding drepinn,
ok Ölvi var
aldrs of synjat.*

You gossiped
With young girls, Sjolf,
While we sent flames playing
Through the homestead.
The hard man,
Lord Hadding we defeated;
Old age is
Denied to Olvir.

*Þú látt, Sigurður,
í sal meyja,
meðan við Bjarma
börðumst tvisvar,
háðum hildi
hauksnarliga,
en þú, seggr, í sal
svaft und blæju.*

You, Sigurður, were
Under the linens with young girls
While with the Bjarma
We clashed in battle,
And sat at the table twice,
Keen as a hawk.
And you, man,
Slept under the linen.
(O-O: 3:44-4:16).

In the first stanza, Odd argues that while he ventured into battle as is proper and manly, Sjolf chose to remain at home gossiping with girls. In the second stanza, he argues that while he battled the Bjarma twice, Sigurður chose to remain in bed with young girls. He argues that Sjolf chooses to perform womanly actions instead of manly ones and that Sigurður, in choosing sex over battle, displays cowardice (Sørensen 1983: 20).

Later in the contest, Odd accuses Sjolf of further sexual deviancies.

*Sjólf, vart eigi,
þar er sverð ruðum
hvöss á jarli
fyr Hléseyju;
en þú hallaðist
heima á milli,
kynmálasamr,
kálfs ok þýjar.*

Sjolf, you were not there
When we reddened pointed swords
On the Earl of Læso.
And you, sex-mad,
Sat at home,
Considering
The calf or the slave girl.
(O-O: 5:14-20)

In this stanza, Odd accuses Sjolf of choosing to remain at home instead of venturing in to battle in order to sate his irregular sexual appetites, which may include bestiality (a worse action than being with girls). Metaphorically, these three insults may be accusations of cowardice; Odd may use sexual insults to condemn cowardice in both his opponents, arguing in sexual terms that cowardice is unmanly.

Similarly, in the *Brennu-Njals*, Skarp-heðinn accuses Thorkell of preferring woman's work to man's work.

Hefir þú og lítt riðið til alþingis eða starfað í þingdeildum og mun þér kringra að hafa ljósverk að búi þínu að Öxará í fásinninu.

You have rarely ridden to the Alþing or worked on lawsuits, and it must be easier for you to milk cows than to sit here at the Oxara River in isolation. (B-N: 8:4-6)

His argument is that Thorkell, in rarely performing the duties of his station (attending the *Alþing* and taking part in lawsuits), proves himself unworthy under the code of *drengskapr* to call himself a man, but the insult comes not from this accusation but from Skarp-heðinn's following statement that Thorkell is "more at home" performing a woman's duties on the farm than he is performing a man's duties at the *Alþing*.

Elsewhere, Skarp-heðinn makes an indirect sexual slander against Gudmund the Powerful.

Skarphéðinn mælti: "Veit eg að þú þykist til mín mæla og er eigi einn veg farið ógæfu okkarri. Eg hefi á mæli af vígi Höskulds Hvítanesgoða sem vorkunn er en þeir gerðu illmæli um þig Þorkell hákur og Þórir Helgason og hefir þú af því hina mestu skapraun."

Skarp-heðinn proclaimed: "I know you are talking about me. But we walk an unlucky path, each in his own way. I stand condemned, as is only right, for the killing of Hoskuldr Hvítanes-goði; but you have been condemned by Thorkell Foul-Mouth and Thorir Helgason, and you have greatest slander from them." (B-N: 6:1-7)

While the other insults in this category are clear, the vagueness of Skarp-heðinn's condemnation of Gudmund requires explanation. In the *Ljósvetninga saga*, Thorkell accuses

Gudmund of passive homosexuality by saying, “Now I can say that your arse has already slaked its thirst at most other sources, but I think that it has not so far drunk milk.” (qtd. in Sørensen 1983: 37). Other Icelandic texts, such as the *Olkofra þáttr*, reference this event and Gudmund’s failure to take the proper actions to disprove the slander – revenge (Sørensen 1983: 36-37). The original insult clearly had the force of an accusation of sexual irregularity, but Skarp-heðinn’s reference to it may be symbolic. Both of Skarp-heðinn’s sexual insults may metaphorically relate to the failings of his opponents to properly perform the social duties required to be deemed manly under the code of *drengskapr*.

While I place all insults that incorporate sexual language inside the category of sexual irregularity, the use of sexual insult clearly relates to both the categories of physicality and social duties. The separation of categories is primarily heuristic, and the relationship among the categories of physicality, social duties, and sexual irregularity illustrates how interconnected these concepts were in the Norse mind. Assuming that the language is metaphoric, sexual slander argues that the misdeeds, inactions, or negative qualities of one’s opponent are the complete antithesis of *drengskapr* – womanly instead of manly.

APPEARANCE AND ALIMENTARY TABOO

Physicality, sexual deviance, and social duties comprise the majority of boasts and insults delivered in Norse verbal duels. However, my data also reveals that boasts and insults can occur in one other category, physical appearance, and that insults can occur in a second category, the violation of alimentary taboos. The infrequency of boasts and insults in these categories suggests that they were of significantly less importance in proving one’s manliness. These categories may serve other purposes. Physical appearance boasts and insults may relate

indirectly to another category. In the case of alimentary taboo violations, the inclusion of such an insult may serve to add shock value and humor to the situation.

Only one duelist, Eysteinn, boasts about his appearance, and only one duelist, Skarp-heðinn, has his appearance insulted. After a series of rounds where Eysteinn and his brother Sigurður boast about their physical exploits during their childhood, Sigurður articulates his premise that physical/martial exploits distinguish a king from other men. Eysteinn uses appearance as a bridge when he changes the subject to their social dealings as kings of Norway by saying:

Eigi er þat síðr einkanna h lutr, at maðr sé fríðr, ok er sá ok auðkendr í mannfjolða; þykki mé þat ok hofðingligt, þvíat fríðleikinum sómir inn bezti búnaðr; kann ek ok miklu betr til laga en þú, ok svá hvat sem vit skulum tala, em ek miklu sléttorðari.

It is no less a distinction that a man is of a handsome appearance, so as to be easily known from others on that account; and this appears to me more noble, because the best ornament is allied to beauty. Also, I know more about the law than you, and whatever we should talk about, I speak more eloquently than you do. (Mag: 2: 17-20).

Following Sigurður's boast about looking stronger and being more physically imposing than his brother, Eysteinn implies that he is more handsome and that such an appearance is more valuable to a king than being physically imposing is. His argument is that an attractive physical appearance allows a king to be visually distinguished and that physical beauty accompanies all the best mental and social abilities, thus making him a better king.

Conversely, all five of the *goðar* who verbally spar with Skarp-heðinn begin by insulting his appearance, arguing that an unattractive appearance allies itself with unsavory and anti-social behavior. Skapti Thoroddsson articulates this connection metaphorically when he asks:

"Hver er sá maður," segir Skapti, "er fjórir menn ganga fyrri, mikill maður og fölleitur, ógæfusamlegur, harðlegur og tröllslegur?"

"Who is that man," said Skapti, "the fifth man in the line, that tall and fierce-looking man, with the ill-starred, pale, and trollish look?" (B-N: 2:23-24)

Through the allegation that Skarp-heðinn looks like a troll and not like a human, Skapti separates Skarp-heðinn from not only proper manly behavior but also proper human behavior. Skapti thus articulates that Skarp-heðinn's killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-goði separates the young warrior from all that is human, making him unfit for society and unable to behave properly. While any may clearly grasp that to be said to be like a troll is to be monstrous, in Norse lore, trolls were unbridled and indiscriminate in their passions – especially for violence and sex (Sørensen 1983: 24-25).

Alimentary taboo violation proves to be the rarest category of insult in my data set. Only once does anyone accuse another of such a violation. In the *Brennu-Njals saga*, Skarp-heðinn concludes his string of accusations of Thorkell's improper behavior by adding:

Er þér og nær að stanga úr tönnum þér rassgarnarendann merarinnar er þú ást áður en þú riðir til þings og sá smalamaður þinn og undraðist hann er þú gerðir slíka fúlmennsku.

You should clean the sausage from your teeth you sucked out of a mare's ass before you came here – your shepherd saw you at it, and was appalled at such disgusting behavior. (B-N: 8-6-8)

After a series of insults designed to separate Thorkell from the social ideal of a fit, Norse male, Skarp-heðinn finishes his turn with a shocking insult that he supports with two pieces of evidence. He claims to see remnants of feces in Thorkell's teeth, suggesting that Thorkell eats feces, and he cites an eye-witness: Thorkell's shepherd. While an acceptable manly profession, herding sheep is normally performed by a hired servant – not by a chieftain (Byock 2001: 28-29). Through citing the shepherd and his disgust at Thorkell's action, Skarp-heðinn symbolically strips Thorkell of any resemblance of masculine manliness and brings low the haughty, foul-mouthed *goði* (Sørensen 1983: 28, Swenson 1991: 61). Skarp-heðinn's complete utterance also

displays categorical escalation. He accuses Thorkell first of familial failings, then broadens it to Thorkell's failings as a *goði*, and concludes with Thorkell failing to properly act like a man of any social status.

OTHER UTTERANCES

Skarp-heðinn's insults of Thorkell lead to another form of utterance in verbal duels: the threat/challenge. After Skarp-heðinn finishes his first turn, Thorkell changes tactics, leaping to his feet and boasting of his skill with his sword. He escalates the importance of his boast by concluding with the following threat:

Og þegar er eg næ til þín skal eg reka það í gegnum þig og skalt þú það hafa fyrir fáyrði þín.

And when I get to you I shall run you through with it and pay you back for your obscene words (B-N: 8:13-14).

Skarp-heðinn replies in kind. He brandishes his axe, boasts of his skill in battle with a named opponent, ascends the dais where Thorkell sits, and utters his own challenge and threat combination.

Skarphéðinn mælti þá: "Ger þú nú annaðhvort þorkell hákur að þú slíðra saxið og sest niður eða eg keyri öxina í höfuð þér og klýf þig í herðar niður."

Skarp-heðinn then proclaimed: "And now, Thorkel Foul-Mouth, sheath your sword and sit down, or I shall drive my axe into your head and cleave your skull to your shoulders (B-N: 8:2-3)."

Skarp-heðinn's response to Thorkell's challenge/threat ups the ante again, leaving Thorkell with only two options: accept the challenge or back down in disgrace – an action that the narrator claims Thorkell previously vowed he would never do (B-N: 6:39-40). Thorkell sits, defeated and disgraced, and Skarp-heðinn returns to his family's booth victorious, earning powerful support from Gudmund for the upcoming trial. While the content of the verbal dueling utterances

would suggest that violent endings conclude the episode, most verbal duels end peacefully, being a complete combat event in itself. In the longer context of the saga, a *mannjafnaðr* may serve as a central event in a series of causal events leading to an eventual, violent climax as it does in the *Brennu-Njals* (Clover 1980: 459).

Another example of a challenge occurs at the end of the *Magnussona* where Sigurðr concludes his final turn with the following challenge

...en út á bakkanum er kjarr nøkkut, en þar á kjarrinu reið ek knút ok mæltá ek svá fyrir,
at þú skyldir leysa, bróðir, eða hafa elligar þvílíkan formála, sem þar var á lagðr.

... On the bank there is a bush of willows, and there I twisted a knot of willows, and said this: knot you should untie, brother, or take the curse attached to it. (Mag: 3: 25-27).

Sigurðr, after relating his own exploits during the Crusades, escalates his assault by adding a challenge that he powers with a curse. The tied knot challenges Eysteinn to exemplify *drengskapr* by venturing away from home and valiantly entering battle. To add force to his challenge, he attaches a curse to the knot should Eysteinn fail to untie it. The precise details of the curse Sigurðr uttered remain unrecorded in the saga. However, from his previous allegations against his older brother, I infer that this curse's purpose is to emphasize disdain for Eysteinn's lack of exploits outside Norway by attaching a supernatural potency to his challenge. This further escalates the challenge by adding the divine and/or infernal potentates of the supernatural realm as witnesses to both his deeds that mark **him** as a *drengskapr* exemplar and the challenge issued to his "home-dragging" brother.

The prophecy is another type of utterance found in a *mannjafnaðr*. The *Brennu-Njals* contains the only prophecy among the cases in my data set. The saga contains little information

regarding the specifics of the utterance, but the characters in the saga recognize the utterance as being a prophecy. The example in the *Brennu-Njals* occurs when Snorri tells Skarp-heðinn:

Það að mér þykir þú maður harðlegur og mikilfenglegur en þó get eg að þrotin sé nú þín hin mesta gæfa og skammt get eg eftir þinnar ævi.

I think you look very ruthless and formidable, but my guess is that you have exhausted your store of good luck, and that you have not long to live (B-N: 4:-7-8).

Skarp-heðinn responds and acknowledges this as a prophecy through use of the noun *spá*:

Því að þá skuld eiga allir að gjalda. En þó er þér meiri nauðsyn að hefna föður þíns en að spá mér slíkar spár.

That is a debt we all have to pay. However, it is more necessary for you to avenge your father than to make such prophecies about me (B-N: 4:12-13).

Narrative analysis suggests that Snorri's prophecy foreshadows Skarp-heðinn's death in the latter part of the saga.

However, when examined with Skarp-heðinn's response we deduce two things. The first is Snorri's opinion of Skarp-heðinn's killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-goði; he articulates that this killing, regardless of intent, places Skarp-heðinn in a precarious situation from which he most likely will not emerge alive. The second is how an individual (Skarp-heðinn, in this instance) may interpret this utterance type as an insult against him. While Snorri's intent may not have been to insult, Skarp-heðinn's response indicates that Skarp-heðinn sees the statement as a criticism of his action being socially unpopular at the least and socially unacceptable and dishonorable at the worst. Therefore, he responds to his interpretation of Snorri's statement by recasting the utterance as unworthy and of little value because it comes from a man who chooses to talk instead of to act.

Verbal dueling is an oral interaction in which silence also plays an important role. Silence serves two purposes in literary depictions of verbal duels. The first is to announce the ending of the episode as it does in the *Magnussona*. After King Eysteinn's final retort, the narrator returns to say that "*Eptir þat þognuðu þeir báðir* (Thereupon both were silent)" (Mag: 4:1). In the *Morkinskinna*, after King Eysteinn delivers his final speech, the episode ends without further contribution from both Sigurðr and the narrator. Silence may also indicate the defeat and surrender of the silent party. In the *Örvar-Oddr saga*, Sjolf and Sigurðr remain silent for three turns while Odd the Great continues delivering boastful and insulting verses before their audience. After the third round, Odd asks "*Hrókr hernuminn, / hví þegir þú nú?* (Captive fool, / Why are you not talking now?) (O-O: 6:31-32)." Similarly, in the *Brennu-Njals saga*, Thorkell responds with silence to Skarp-heðinn's challenge threat.

Þorkell slíðraði saxið og sest niður þegar og hafði hvorki orðið á fyrir honum áður né síðan.

Thorkell sheathed his sword and sat down promptly. It was the only time either before or after that such a thing happened to him. (B-N: 8:29-30)

When an opponent fails to take his turn in combat, he acknowledges defeat.

The Norse *mannjafnaðr* presents a formalized, structured arena for men to prove their manliness and claim honor and social prestige through verbally besting their opponents. The two forms of attack in verbal duels are boasts and insults. Five categories of boast and insult: physicality, sexual deviancy, social duties, appearance, and violation of alimentary taboos exist. Not all categories find expression in both boast and insult forms; no boasts about a man's virility, being a good family member, or obeying alimentary taboos appear. A hierarchy that places physicality, social duties, and sexual deviancy as the primary categories of boast and

insult emerges from my data set, suggesting that the primary defining characteristics of Norse masculinity are dominance over one's self and others (physical strength, martial skill, sexual "regularity") and honorable actions in the social world (courage, victory in battle, and honorable dealings with kin and others). The boasts by King Eysteinn and the insults hurled at Skarp-heðinn suggest a belief that a connection between one's physical appearance and the "rightness" of one's character exists. Accusing one's opponent of violating alimentary taboos finds inclusion possibly for shock value, humor, or to add "insult to injury."

The events and actions related by these utterances are not to be seen as either wild accusations or "outrageous charges assuredly not meant to be taken literally" (Chambers 1959: 28). The utterances often incorporate metaphor and evocative language. However, they are not ritual in the sense that Labov described ritual insults: insults that all competitors recognize as performance pieces to be evaluated on the displayed verbal dexterity of the duelist and not as literal accusations of some failure (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). Instead the use of stylized and figurative language occurs to display a combatant as being skilled in the applied eloquence required to prevail in a verbal duel (Clover 1980: 452), to symbolically depict powerlessness (Swenson 1991: 61), or to add further humiliation when a sexual insult borders on *nið* (Sørensen 1983: 68). The factuality of the actions and events are never disputed even when they are accusations of gross social impropriety; what the duelists dispute is the meaning of the events and their opponents' interpretation that those events mark the insulted party as unmanly and socially unfit. And while a physical confrontation is a possible outcome, my data set confirms Clover's analysis that silence concludes most verbal duels (1980: 459). What

Clover does not articulate, but my data set reveals, is that silence on the part of one combatant serves not only to end the verbal duel but as an admission of defeat.

CHAPTER IV: THEME AND META-THEME OF NORSE VERBAL DUELING

In the two previous chapters, I discussed the structure and content of all-male Norse verbal dueling wherein men compete to prove who is more manly and honorable through verbal combat at the expense of his opponent(s). My analysis revealed that Norse verbal duelists incorporate diverse rhetorical strategies as they compete in this highly structured and stylized speech act genre. During these contests, they boast about their accomplishments and insult the failings of their opponents in five interrelated categories: physicality, social duties, sexual deviancy, appearance, and violation of alimentary taboos. The given arrangement is hierarchical, based upon the frequency of utterances in my data set. That analysis works toward filling gaps in the academic literature and to present a fuller picture of Norse masculinity than currently finds depiction in contemporary popular discourse.

I now focus on analyzing the themes of Norse verbal duels. Analyzing the themes of the duels will present a fuller picture of the aspects of life that factor into the Norse conception of masculinity. These aspects include: stages of life, categories of social interaction, valuations of categories considered to be binary opposites, and folk beliefs. Additionally, each verbal duel has a meta-theme, an overarching question that the duelists debate in their attempt to prove their own masculinity and manliness. Explicit knowledge of the meta-theme need not be present by the characters involved, but analysis of the meta-theme affords insight into the questions Norse men asked about what being a man in saga-era Iceland entailed. Additionally, analysis of the meta-theme has literary applications in that it aligns with the theme of the respective saga. The meta-theme of the verbal duel presents a dramatic encapsulation of “what the saga is all about.”

The academic literature largely ignores the topic of theme in saga verbal dueling. When noted, its mention barely escapes footnote treatment. Carol Clover argues that “crimes of kinship emerge as a central theme” (1980: 453). Karen Swenson notes, more specifically, that in the *Morkinskinna*, the verbal duel between King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr exposes the tension underneath the surface of the brothers’ co-rule of Norway; she argues that the verbal duel provides a release valve that allows stress to dissipate enough so that peaceful rule may be maintained (1991: 50-52). While scholars have noted that themes exist in individual verbal duels and across the collective body of verbal duels, no systematic analysis of the themes and of their importance to the cultural conceptions of the Norse and to the literary genre of the saga has been produced.

My purpose in this chapter is to provide such an analysis of the themes and meta-themes of the verbal duels in my data set. Through analysis of various discursive features in the content of the verbal dueling utterances, I performed a turn-by-turn analysis of the verbal duels, and through that analysis, the themes of the individual verbal duels emerged. In performing this analysis, I looked for patterns of repetition in discourse and in content. An example from the *Morkinskinna* is King Eysteinn’s repetition of the following phrase or a variant thereof.

mono þeir menn muna ... at Eystein Konungr hefir verit iNoregi

and those people will remember... that Eystein was king in Norway

He repeats this phrase or a close variant four times during a list of the deeds he performed that benefitted the Norwegian people. This repetition set amidst a specific series of actions suggests that one theme of the *mannjafnaðr* in this saga is that a king’s deeds prove him to exemplify *drengskapr* and are worthy of remembrance. Similarly, when the utterances of the

duelists in a saga's *mannjafnaðr* repeat oppositions (venturing out/staying at home, action/talk, or male duties/female duties), these repetitions, especially when they occur across multiple categories of boast and insult, reveal one or more of the duel's themes. I then analyzed the emergent themes in each duel to discern the meta-theme for each duel. I will present my argument in two sections, one for the themes and the meta-themes and one for significance of the meta-theme of the verbal duel narrative to the larger saga narrative.

MORKINSKINNA & MAGNUSSONA

The verbal duel in the *Morkinskin* between King Sigurðr and his brother King Eysteinn has two interrelated themes: physical superiority and social superiority. King Sigurðr begins the duel (and spends three of his four turns) arguing for his physical superiority by saying that he is “*maðr stercari oc syndr betr*” “the stronger man and better at swimming (Mork: 1:41)”, “*vapnfør eigi ver en þu. Oc at riða ityrniment*” “no less skilled with weapons than you, and no less good at riding in tournaments (Mork: 2:6-7)”, and, in his final turn, a victorious veteran of the Crusades (Mork: 2:29-36). Sigurðr's argument is that a king must be superior to all other men, and if men exemplify *drengskapr* through physical and martial prowess, then a king must be superior to all other men in those arenas. To that end, he cites his physical strength, his skill at military games, and his victories in famous battles where he fought against the enemies of Christendom.

King Eysteinn appears to concede his younger brother's superiority in the martial arena; he chooses instead to shift the focus to his arena: domestic and social duties. He begins by arguing that he is “*maðr hagari oc teflig hneftafl betr*” “more skilled and better at playing chess” (Mork: 2:1), which he values equal to his brother's martial strength. He continues to

argue that handling disputes for one's countrymen is of greater value than his brother's skill at weapons and riding in tournaments; to this, Sigurðr replies that, while his brother is wise in handling disputes, he often makes false promises, which is bad for a king (Mork:2:9-19). Eysteinn concludes the duel with a long list of his deeds that benefited the people of Norway, repeatedly punctuating his speech with a variation of the phrase

mono þeir men myna at E. konyngur hefir verið í Noregi

and those people will remember that Eysteinn was king in Norway (Mork: 2:43-44).

Eysteinn argues that a good king, worthy of remembrance, possesses the social skills necessary to govern successfully and performs deeds that benefit his people. His evidence for his superiority in this arena includes his superiority at chess (a social and strategic game), his oral eloquence and skill at mediation, and a series of projects he undertook that directly benefitted the Norwegian people.

As with all the verbal duels in my data set, the meta-theme of the *Morkinskinna* arises from analysis of the interrelationship of the multiple themes of the individual duels. The meta-theme of the *Morkinskinna*'s verbal duel, phrased as a question, is, "What sort of deeds make for a better king?" Eysteinn alludes to this before the duel begins by asking

Erom við eigi synir Magnus konyngs íafnbörnir

Are we not equal sons of King Magnus?" (Mork: 1:27-28).

He argues that Sigurðr appears to be disgraced by Eysteinn and then asks what he sees as the greatest difference between them (Mork: 1:27-29). Additionally, Eysteinn's repeated needling about how others will remember that he was king in Norway and not his younger brother references this meta-theme and alludes to the saga-writer's answer to the question.

The key dispute in the duel, as it relates to both the content and meta-theme, is whether tending to domestic matters is equally important as martial disputes done abroad. The contested categories of kingly behavior relate directly to the social duties and martial abilities categories from the previous chapter, the categories that provided eighty percent of the total utterances. The prevailing opinion, as depicted in the majority of Icelandic sources and within the scholarly literature, is that Sigurðr's martial conquests abroad should trump Eysteinn's handling of domestic affairs at home (Sørensen 1983: 20-21, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 77). While the narrator provides no direct evidence of the response of the men to be entertained (Mork 1: 18-19), the length of Eysteinn's final turn, which is significantly longer and more content-heavy than any other turn taken by either brother, suggests that Eysteinn's argument that tending domestic affairs that directly benefit the populace is more fitting behavior for a king proves superior to Sigurðr's argument that leading an army to martial conquests abroad makes a one more manly and the better king.

In the larger work known as the *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturlusson adapted the verbal duel recounted in the *Morkinskinna* in a section of his work named the *Magnussona* by scholars. His retelling of the verbal duel between the brother kings contains two themes: superiority in boyhood deeds, superiority in kingly pursuits. Snorri's work articulates the conception that one's upbringing plays a role in shaping the character of a man. While Eysteinn argues that this duel occurs to amuse those at a drinking party, the narrative voice tells us at the end of the duel:

Eptir þat þognuðu þeir baðir, ok var hvartveggi reiðr

Thereupon both were silent, and there was anger on both sides (Mag: 3:29).

This anger from both parties suggests that there is at least tension beneath the peace of the brothers' co-rule of Norway, and other events in both the *Magnussona* and the *Morkinskinna* corroborate this. However, while the *Morkinskinna* focuses on the location of the deed (at home v. abroad) and the type of deed (handling domestic affairs v. martial conquest), Snorri's take on this verbal duel adds the upbringing and education of princes as important elements. This proves to be a background motivator for Eysteinnn initiating this verbal duel. As earlier sections of the saga recount, there has been much dispute over the decision to split the rule of Norway between the two brothers. Eysteinnn acknowledges this by saying:

*un ek taka þik, broðir, til jafnaðarmannz mer. Færi ek þat til, at jafnt nafn hofum vit
baðr ok jafna eign; geri ek engi mun ættar okkarrar eða upfæzlu*

Now I will take you, brother, to compare myself with. I will make it appear so as if we had both equal reputation and equal property, I may not make any difference in our birth and upbringing. (Mag: 1:18-20)

The first theme is superiority in boyhood deeds. The first three turns in the verbal duel feature the brothers recounting their superiority in deeds from their childhoods. Sigurðr contends that he is superior at wrestling, swimming, and archery (Mag: 1:22-23, 1:29-29, 2:6-7). All his boasts include his superior physical strength and endurance over his older brother; his swimming accomplishment is his ability to drag Eysteinnn under the water.

mantu, hversu for um sundit með okr; ek matta kefja þik, ef ek vilda

Do you remember that when we swam together, I could drag you under water, if I wanted? (Mag: 1:28-29).

Eysteinnn responds in his three turns by boasting of his superiority in agility games, swimming, skating, and skiing (Mag: 1:25-26, 2:2-4, 2:9-11). All of his boasts relate to dexterity and balance, and Eysteinnn also escalates the duel in his second turn by boasting of two

accomplishments: his diving ability and his skill on snow skates. Sigurðr responds to this tactic by ending his boast about his superior bow skill by arguing that Eysteinn could not even draw his (Sigurðr's) bow "*þottu spyrnir fotum*" "even if you used your foot (Mag:2:4-6)" as a further suggestion of his brother's lack of strength as a boy, implying that such weakness makes him weak as a king. It should be noted that the draw weight of the average longbow during this period would be between 150-200 pounds (Oakeshott 1960: 294-297), thus making physical strength a necessity to an archer.

Superiority through kingly pursuits is the second theme of this verbal duel, and Sigurðr, who initiates the theme change in his fourth turn, continues to boast about his superior physical strength as a marker of him being a superior king.

Þess þykkir mikill munr, at þat er hofðingligr, at sa, er yfirmaðr skl vera annarra manna, se mikill í flokki, sterker ok vapnfærr betr en aðrir men ok auðsær ok auðendr, þa er flestir eru saman.

It appears to me much better for a king who is to be the superior of other men, that he is conspicuous in a crowd, and stronger and more powerful at weapons than other men; easily seen, and easily known, where there are many together. (Mag: 2:13-15)

Eysteinn parries and ripostes by changing categories discussed twice in his turn: first to appearance "*þiat friðleikum somir inn bezti bunaðr*" "the best gifts are allied to beauty (Mag: 2:18-19)" and then to social duties "*kan ek ok miklu betr til laga en þu, ok sva hvat sem vit skulum tala, em ek miklu slettorðari*" "Also, I know more about the law than you, and on every subject, I speak more eloquently than you do (Mag: 2:19-20)". This double categorical transition allows Eysteinn to position himself within a realm of discussion of which he is more secure.

During the final two turns of the duel, Sigurðr attempts to parry Eysteinn's assault by negating Eysteinn's skill at law and shifting focus back to the realm of physical superiority (martial conquests) of which he is more suited to verbally spar. He argues first that while Eysteinn does know more about the law and speaks more eloquently than he does, Eysteinn often breaks the promises he makes to those whose cases he is settling, and "*ok er þat ekki konungligt*" "and that is not kingly (Mag: 2:22-25)". He then, on his final turn, attempts to shift the discussion back to his martial conquests, specifically those abroad, spending his final three turns describing his expeditions and battles in foreign lands. These "princely" expeditions he contrasts to his brother's staying at home and being "princess-ly" in the first of these turns.

þat hefir verit mal manna, at ferð su, ere k for or landi, væri heldr hofðinglig, en þ azt heima meðan sem dottir foður þins.

Everyone speaks about the expedition that I made out of the country as a princely expedition, while you in the meantime sat at home like your father's daughter (Mag: 3:4-5).

While his final turns keep the focus of his argument on the good he did for the people of Norway, Eysteinn responds to Sigurðr's emasculating comment in kind – reminding his brother that it was he who financially supported these princely expeditions as if he were dowering a sister.

ak ek gerða þik heiman sem systur minna, aðr þu yrðir buinn til ferðar.

The truth of the matter is that I equipped you from home like a sister, before you went upon this expedition. (Mag: 3:8-9)

He then returns to discussing the things he did for the people of Norway: building churches, harbors, safe passages, and royal halls. All of these things, he argues, that Sigurðr's expeditions are "*litit gagn riki*" "of little honor" (Mag: 3:22-23) to the people of Norway, which he contrasts

with his deeds by saying, “*en nytsamlingra var hitt landi varu*” “but it was more useful for this country what I did” (Mag: 3:17-18). In his duel-ending final turn, Eysteinnn does manage to impugn Sigurðr’s physical dominance by reminding his younger brother that his tales of physical and martial dominance abroad do not match with his less-than-triumphant return to Norway in “*einskipa*” “a single ship (Mag: 3:31)”.

Like the *Morkinskinna*, the meta-theme of the *Magnussona* is the question, “What makes a better king?” While the *Morkinskinna* focuses on the stark differences in the focus of the two brothers’ adult endeavors, Snorri, a historian and *goði*, intertwines these divergent foci with a discussion of the upbringing and education of princes. With the apparent equality of their upbringing and adolescent exploits, as evidenced by three rounds of boasts relating to physical accomplishments, Snorri argues that what makes a great king is what the king does that benefits his countrymen. Thus, while Sigurðr earned great honor and renown for himself by venturing abroad and fighting in the Crusades, Eysteinn’s building projects provided more benefit for those in need of a king’s assistance in Norway. Thus, like the *Morkinskinna*, the answer to the meta-thematic question is that a king becomes great through actions that benefit the people of his kingdom and not himself.

BRENNU-NJALS

Written in the latter part of the thirteenth century, the *Brennu-Njals* contains a verbal duel focusing not on kings – as Iceland had no kings – but on men coming from respected families. The duel takes place on the eve of Skarp-heðinn’s trial at the *Alþing*; the narrator employs a picaresque format of repeated interactions as the contingent travels from booth to booth in an effort to gain support for their case. Three themes emerge during Skarp-heðinn’s interactions

with five of the six *goðar* the group encounters: the perceived relationship between appearance and character, the proper social actions men must perform, and the binary division between masculine and feminine worlds.

The theme of a culturally perceived relationship between appearance and character argues the belief that appearance reflects character. This theme permeates the entirety of the verbal duel. Each of Skarp-heðinn's five opponents references that his less-than-handsome face reflects that his deeds are dishonorable and less-than-manly. Skafti Þóroddsson articulates this connection most graphically with his question to Asgrim about the monstrous looking man in his contingent.

"Hver er sá maður," segir Skafti, "er fjórir menn ganga fyrri, mikill maður og fölleitur, ógæfusamlegur, harðlegur og tröllslegur?"

"Who is is that man, "said Skafti, "the fifth man in the line, that tall and fierce-looking man, with the ill-starred, pale, and trollish look?" (B-N: 2:19-24)

The accusations that an ugly appearance reflects an ugly character form the counterweight of Eysteinn's argument in the *Magnussona* that good gifts and good qualities ally themselves with a handsome face. While not the most important of the themes in this duel, this culturally-perceived relationship between appearance and character affords us, in addition to a small glimpse at the worldview of the Norse people, an opportunity to see how Norse verbal duelists incorporate understatement and subtext into their insults.

If a man's appearance reflects his character, then a man with an ugly face would likely act improperly with regard to kin and countrymen. That assumption arises from the second theme: to be a man requires honorable and proper social interaction both within and without the kin group. The first reference to this theme comes from Gizur the White when he tells Asgrim,

“Það mundi Jorunn systir mín ætla að eg mundi eigi undan skerast að veita þér. Skal og svo vera nú og oftar að eitt skal ganga yfir okkur báða.” “My sister Jorunn would expect me not to shrink from helping you. You and I shall stand side by side, now and always” (B-N: 1:20-21). This example showing cooperation and assistance in times of need between brothers-in-law depicts proper social relations between kinsmen.

While some men behave properly and with honor toward kinsmen and others, not all exemplify the social ideal. The *goðar* whom Skarp-heðinn opposes imply that his killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-goði was an improper social action (killing someone in vengeance who may not have incurred liability for such). Skarp-heðinn accuses four of his five opponents of improper social action. Of those four, he accuses three of improper action toward their kin. He accuses Snorri of failing to avenge his father’s death (B-N: 4:12-13), Haf of not reclaiming his sister who was abducted (B-N: 5:2-5), and Thorkel of fighting with and threatening the life of his father (B-N: 8:3-4). Skarp-heðinn also accuses Gudmund and Thorkel of improper action in other social situations. Gudmund fails to avenge slander against him that impugned his masculinity (B-N: 6:4-7), and he accuses Thorkel of additionally failing in his role as a *goði*.

Hefir þú og lítt riðið til alþingis eða starfað í þingdeildum

You have rarely ridden to the *Alþing* or worked on lawsuits (B-N: 8:4-5). Attending the *Alþing* and participating in lawsuits, either as a speaker for members of his district or as a member of the jury, are duties of a *goði*, and by rarely performing these actions, Thorkel fails to display himself as a worthy, honorable man. Additionally, Thorkel violates proper social relations by being the only *goði* who does not offer Asgrim and his contingent hospitality, evidenced by the lack of a variant of the clause “*bauð honum að sitja*” “he bade him

to sit” at the end of the narration when the group enters his booth. While the *goði* imply that Skarp-heðinn acted improperly in this regard, Skarp-heðinn explicitly defends his masculinity through accusations that his accusers are guilty of equal or worse misdeeds in their social interactions.

If the proper performance of one’s social obligations is both honorable and manly in the Norse world, then failing to perform them would be unmanly. And in Norse society, the ultimate expression of unmanliness for a man was to be womanly (Sørensen 1983: 20-21). The third and final theme of the verbal duel in the *Brennu-Njals* is the dichotomy between “masculine” and “feminine” in the Norse world. While all verbal duelists using insults attempt to separate their opponents from the Norse ideal of manliness, not all insults imply effeminacy. Skarp-heðinn accuses three of his five opponents of some form of effeminate/unmanly behavior. His accusation against Gudmund is an indirect insult relating to previous accusations made against Gudmund by Thorkel and Thorir (B-N: 6:4-7).

Against Haf the Wealthy and Thorkel Foul-Mouth, his accusations are more direct, and both relate to a specific set of duties performed only by females. Skarp-heðinn designates Haf to be “*mjólki*” [a milksop], a word that, in English (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and Norse (*Cleasby-Vigfusson*), means a weak and effeminate male. A more explicit reference to unmanliness through milk metaphors occurs when Skarp-heðinn lashes out at Thorkel:

mun þér kringra að hafa ljósverk að búi þínu að Öxará í fásinninu.

It must be easier for you to milk cows than to sit here at the Oxara River in isolation (B-N: 8:5-6).

Because female mammals produce milk to feed their offspring, milking and other actions related to dairy-production became culturally gendered feminine in medieval Iceland. Skarp-

heðinn articulates through this theme that his opponents' accusations that his inability to restrain his violent urges are less unmanly than their effeminacy, suggesting an unwillingness or an inability to act like men. While femininity appears as a pejorative in these verbal duels, I wish to stress that womanly behavior was only viewed in a negative context when applied to a man's actions (Sørensen 1980: 20).

Taken together, the three themes of the *Brennu-Njals* verbal duel present different aspects of the question that forms the meta-theme: What makes a man – actions or words? Skarp-heðinn first articulates this theme against Snorri when he says

En þó er þér meiri nauðsyn að hefna föður þíns en að spá mér slíkar spár.

However, it is more necessary for you to avenge your father than to make such prophecies about me (B-N: 4:12-13).

Skarp-heðinn argues that while Snorri proves gifted with speech to the point of being able to make prophetic utterances, those words prove to be of little worth when the speaker proves unwilling to take proper action when a kinsman needs avenging. Against Gudmund's accusation, Skarp-heðinn argues that, while he is the one who now stands trial, he stands trial for action but Gudmund stands trial (in the court of public opinion) for inaction.

Eg hefi á mæli af vígi Höskulds Hvítanesgoða sem vorkunn er en þeir gerðu illmæli um þig Þorkell hákur og Þórir Helgason og hefir þú af því hina mestu skapraun.

I stand condemned, as is only right, for the killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-goði; but you have been condemned by Thorkell Foul-Mouth and Thorir Helgason, and you have greatest slander from them. (B-N: 6:4-7)

The supremacy of actions over words in the definition of a man becomes apparent in the altercation between Skarp-heðinn and Thorkel. The two men insult each other during their first

turn, but Thorkel changes stances and moves to boast about his martial accomplishments and threaten to prove the validity of his boasts through action.

Þetta sax fékk eg í Svíþjóðu og drap eg til hinn mesta kappá en síðan vó eg margan mann með. Og þegar er eg nær þín skal eg reka það í gegnum þig og skalt þú það hafa fyrir fáyrði þín.

This is the sword I got in Sweden. I killed a great warrior to get it, and since then I have used it to kill many more. And when I get to you I shall run you through with it and pay you back for your obscene words (B-N: 8:12-14).

Skarp-heðinn responds in kind with a boast of his own martial prowess, but before he responds to Thorkel's threat, he escalates the stakes of the verbal duel (adding the very real possibility of a violent end) through action.

Síðan hratt hann þeim frá bræðrum sínum og Kára mági sínum og óð fram að Þorkatli. Skarphéðinn mælti þá: "Ger þú nú annaðhvort Þorkell hákur að þú slíðra saxið og sest niður eða eg keyri öxina í höfuð þér og klýf þig í herðar niður."

He burst past his brothers and his kinsman Kari and charged up to Thorkel: Skarp-heðinn then proclaimed, "And now, Thorkel Foul-Mouth, sheath your sword and sit down, or I shall drive my axe into your head and cleave your skull to your shoulders." (B-N: 8:22-27)

Here, Skarp-heðinn responds to a threat of violence not by backing down or simply replying with a verbal threat but by breaking rank with his contingent (the only time during the episode), drawing his axe, and ascending the dais to stand on even ground with Thorkell. He now demands that Thorkell, to use a cliché, "Put up or shut up."

The narrator clearly articulates that the answer, at least in his opinion, is that actions define a man more definitively than do words, but both prove necessary in the definition process.

Skarp-heðinn incorporates both actions and words, specifically actions that validate his words, in order to win this verbal duel against five *goðar*. The results of the verbal duel confirm that actions prove words in defining a man. In returning to his seat in silence (B-N: 8:29-30),

Thorkell affirms Skarp-heðinn's masculinity and superiority through silent submission. Later that night, Gudmund the powerful hears of Skarp-heðinn's encounter with Thorkell and decides to offer assistance as a result. Once the negotiations begin in the trial, Snorri also takes the lead in negotiating a settlement that prevents Skarp-heðinn from being outlawed. Thus, word-validating actions prove Skarp-heðinn to be manly, making him a member of the community able to count on support from other members – including wealthy, powerful, and respected community members – in times of need.

ÖRVAR-ODDR

Also written in the latter part of the 13th century, the *Örvar-Oddr* saga presents a combined verbal duel and drinking contest in which the titular character, Odd the Great, attempts to best his two opponents, Sjolf and Sigurðr, to save the lives of two of his followers who bet their heads against a twelve-ounce bracelet that Odd could out-drink Sjolf and Sigurðr. This verbal duel saga of the legendary hero Odd the Great, a man seeking to disprove the prophecy that he will not die in battle, contains three themes: dominance v. submission, venturing into battle v. staying at home, and martial conquests v. sexual conquests.

While the theme of dominance v. submission permeates all verbal dueling at least implicitly, the theme finds multiple expressions in this specific duel. Dominance – in battle and of the self – is the preferred quality for men. The contenders must dominate all other opponents verbally, maintaining their dominance over themselves while being hampered by drinking alcohol. After Odd's victory becomes apparent through three rounds of silence by Sjolf and Sigurðr, the narrator says

Eptir þat ríss Oddr upp ok gengr fyrir þá ok þykkist vita, at nú sígr at þeim drykkirinn ok allt saman, at þeir váru fyrir lagðir í skáldskapnum."

After that he stood up, went up to them and saw immediately that the drink had completely defeated them, and that poetry was beyond them. (O-O: 7:17-19)

Having submitted to both Odd's verbal superiority and the power of the beer, Sjolfr and Sigurðr find themselves defeated twice and pass into sleep for the night. Odd the Great has proved his dominance in both areas of the contest: verbal dueling and drinking.

Within the context of the utterances in the verbal duel, the dominance/submission binary opposition finds expression through all boasts and insults. Odd the Great repeatedly boasts of his dominance in the martial arena, as in the following example where he speaks of a battle his forces won and names two individuals, famous and powerful, they killed:

*Slótt við meyjar
málþing, Sjólf,
meðan loga létum
leika um kynni;
unnum harðan
Hadding drepinn,
ok Ölvi var
aldrs of synjat*

With young girls, Sjolfr
While we sent flames playing
Through the homestead.
The hard man,
Lord Hadding we defeated;
Old age
Is denied to Olvir.

*Þú látt, Sigurðr,
í sal meyja,
meðan við Bjarma
börðumst tvisvar,
háðum hildi
hauksnarliga,
en þú, seggr, í sal
svaft und blæju.*

You, Sigurðr, were
Under the linens with young girls
While with the Bjarma
We clashed in battle,
And sat at the table twice,
Keen as a hawk.
And you, man,
Slept under the linen.
(O-O: 4:1-16).

Sjolfr and Sigurðr also boast of their dominance in the martial arena. Additionally, Sjolfr accuses Odd of being submissive to other men, saying he begged for food and aid from farmers – free men who are beneath his social station in the medieval hierarchy.

*Oddr, vart eigi
at eggroði,
þás seggi allvalds
svelta létum;
bark sár þaðan
sex ok átta,
en þú með byggðum
batt þér matar.*

You were not there, Odd
At the clash of weapons
When we let the great king's
Men die.
From there I brought home
Six and eight wounds,
While you were out begging
Food from the farmers.
(O-O: 2:31-38).

All competitors in this verbal duel choose to assert their dominance by boasting about a martial conquest and impugn the alleged dominance of an opponent by accusing him of submitting to someone else and begging from those people. Odd accuses Sjolfr and Sigurðr of submitting to licentious urges; Sjolfr and Sigurðr accuse Odd of submitting to his social inferiors by begging for food to survive.

The second theme of this verbal duel is the opposition of venturing into battle to staying safe at home. The aggressive masculine ethic of the Norse world made venturing into battle an important aspect of manhood; additionally, those who died in battle were the only ones with a chance to enter Valhalla, the shield-hall of Odin and the Norse equivalent of heaven. The venturing into battle permeates the entirety of this duel, as the combatants boast each round of one or more of their martial conquests. The converse, staying at home, finds expression both in repeated syntactic structures, the “*vart eigi at/ut*” “you were not there/when” phrase that begins ten of the stanzas, and in specific accusations made by Odd to Sjolfr and Sigurðr. His first verse begins with such an accusation before he moves to boast of his martial exploits.

*Þit skuluð hlýða
hróðri mínum,
Sigurðr ok Sjolfr,
sessunautar*

Now you shall hear
My praise-song,
Sigurðr and Sjolfr,
Seat-warmers

(O-O: 3:1-4).

Later, Odd specifically targets Sjolfr as one who stayed at home.

*Sjólf, vart eigi,
þar er sjá máttum
brynjur manna
blóði þvegnar;
hrukku oddar
í hringserkjum,
en þú höll konungs
heldr kannaðir.*

Sjolfr, you were not
There when we
Watched the mail-coats
Washing in blood.
Spear-points explored
In the ring-mail;
While you would rather get to know
The king's hall.
(O-O: 4:34-41)

A similar thematic thread runs through the verbal duel relating to whether one has a preference for martial conquests or sexual conquests. Of the two categories, only a preference for martial conquests proves boast-worthy, and a preference for sexual conquests proves insult-worthy (Clover 1980: 453). As the scholarly literature (Clover 1980, Sørensen 1983, Swenson 1991) and the analysis of my data set argue, a preference for sexual conquests suggests either a lack of or a lack of preference for martial conquests; additionally, the assumption made, as I will show with examples from the *Örvar-Oddr* verbal duel, is that choosing sexual conquests implies that the male stays at home – in his respective region of Norse Scandinavia – instead of venturing abroad to earn honor, glory, and wealth in martial conquests.

The preference for dominance over submission, venturing abroad over staying at home, and having martial conquests over sexual conquests as depicted in the three themes of the *Örvar-Oddr* verbal duel lead to a recognition that the meta-theme asks the question, “What kind of deeds make a man worthy of remembrance?” The answer is the deeds associated with the entire complex of *drengskapr*. However, while the *drengskapr* complex includes deeds of

physical prowess, social responsibility, and verbal eloquence (Bauman 1986: 140-141), the verbal duelists in the *Örvar-Oddr* articulate a preference for valorous deeds expressed through verbal eloquence. The verbal duel itself is one such deed, as Odd the Great risks his reputation and honor to defend his comrades, even though they made a stupid bet about his drinking ability. Every boast by the duelists involves recounting a victorious battle in which the speaker participated; the speakers often pair these boasts with either a direct or an indirect insult accusing the speaker's opponent of lacking in such deeds, as Sigurðr's initial verse articulates.

*Oddr, klauft eigi
at orrostu,
hrökk hjálmat lið,
Hamðis skyrtur;
guðr geisaði,
gekk eldr í bæ,
þá er á Vindum
vá sigr konungur.*

Odd, you have never split
Mail-coats in battle,
When the helmed warriors,
Took to their heels;
The war was raging,
Fire raced through the town,
When over the Wends
Our king won victory. (O-O: 2:20-27)

Odd's final speech, which serves as a coda to the verbal duel, begins with an articulation that valorous deeds, and not staying at home, make a man worthy of being in the company of kings.

*Þit munuð hvergi
hæfir þykkja,
Sigurðr ok Sjólfur,
í sveit konungs;
ef Hjálmars getk
ins hugumstóra,
þess er snarpligast
sverði beitti.*

Nowhere will you
Be deemed worthy,
Sigurðr and Sjólf.
Company for a king.
But I bear in mind
Hjalmar the Brave-hearted,
Who wielded his sword
More deftly than any.
(O-O: 7:21-28).

Odd follows this assertion with five stanzas of his own exploits where he lists great warriors he fought alongside and against. The day following Odd's victory in the verbal duel, King Herraúðr recognizes Odd as a greater man than he initially claimed to be; then he bestows great honor upon Odd in recognition of his worthy, valorous deeds.

þat er nú sagt, at þeir færa nú sæti sín ok sitr Oddr it næsta konungi, en Hárekr færir byggð sína fram á stól fyrir konung. Konungr leggur svá mikla virðing á Odd, at engan mann mat hann meira en hann.

Now it is said that they moved their seats and Odd sat next to the king, while Harek moved to a chair in front of the king. The king heaped such great honors upon Odd that no man might have more than he. (O-O: 9:25-27)

While verbal eloquence appears to be an important skill for an honorable, worthy man to master in the Norse world, such eloquence functions within the context of verbal dueling as a vehicle for delivering proof of one's valorous exploits.

Within the context of studying how Norse men perform their masculinity through verbal dueling, analyzing the themes of the verbal duels offer a third angle through which to glimpse the larger picture the sagas present. Each verbal duel has multiple themes relating to diverse aspects of Norse masculinity, focusing on deeds done or not done that make one a man and that gain him honor and social esteem. The themes of the duels relate specifically to the situational context that initiated the verbal duel. Each dual also contains within it a meta-theme, which I argue is the primary question debated by the verbal duelists. Analyzing these themes and meta-themes affords us access to social ideas and binary oppositions that men in saga-era Iceland debated when the question "What makes an adult male a man?" was asked.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Verbal dueling is a practice that occurs in diverse assortment of forms across all cultures. Broadly defined, a verbal duel is a contest between two or more individuals who martial discursive rhetorical skills, using words as weapons, in an attempt to gain honor and prestige (and the accompanying benefits) at the expense of the opponent. Examples of the genres include the Platonic dialogues, playing the dozens, “dissin” amongst rappers, legal proceedings, political campaign advertisements, internet flaming, and Anglo-Saxon *flytings*. Most duels incorporate a turn-taking structure through which the duelists shift rhetorical strategies to either align themselves with the commonly accepted ideals or to separate their opponent(s) from those ideals. Additionally, all verbal duelists must have some knowledge of the duel’s format (“the rules of the game”) and of the social ideals/beliefs related to the actions being debated. There are many differences among the genres regarding the seriousness, the stakes, the rhetorical style, the setting, or the combatants.

This thesis focuses on Norse verbal duel known as the *mannjafnaðr* as presented in four Icelandic sagas: the *Brennu-Njals*, *Örvar-Oddr*, *Morkinskinna*, and *Magnussona* (contained within the *Heimskringla*). A culture that delighted in word play, Icelandic literature from the 10th through the 13th centuries depicts verbal duels across all genres for which we have manuscripts: mythic lays, heroic lays, the sagas, and the short prose *þættir*. The Norse used verbal dueling for both ludic and serious purposes, mixing heavy drinking or drinking contests with the verbal performance.

The question central to my thesis examines how Norse men present themselves as masculine through the *mannjafnaðr*. To answer this question, I translated the duels and then

analyzed their structure, content, and theme. Translating the duels gave me access to certain syntactic features (fronting, verb connotation, and parallel constructions) that may or may not have been evident were I to work from translations and not Old Norse editions. Analyzing the structure, content, and theme of the verbal duels affords insight into both the cultural ideals of masculinity and the questions and debates relating to these categories.

Analyzing the form of Norse verbal duels reveals a highly intricate structure for these stylized speech acts. The verbal duels often feature repeated phrases, sentences, or narrative sections. While the academic literature continues to distinguish between boast and insult duel forms through use of the Old Norse words *mannjafnaðr* and *senna* respectively, evidence from the literary sources does not support separate forms. The mixture of boasts and insults in all of the duels in my data set suggests that one form exists, and that boast and insult utterances represent two broadly-defined strategies through which combatants prove their superiority. The utterance forms, similar to those of modern debate, follow the order of “Claim – Defense (optional) – Counterclaim.” During the verbal duel, adversaries incorporate a variety of rhetorical techniques, changing styles and/or mimicking their opponents’ tactics as each attempts to prove dominance in this word war. When only males compete verbally, the Icelandic term *mannjafnaðr* (man-comparison) proves an appropriate and accurate name; the sagas also refer to male-male verbal duels as *mannjafnaðr*. Conversely, *senna* is a legal term for truth that academic literature designates as the name for the Norse insult duel; however, with the singular exception of the *Lokasenna*, Norse texts do not use *senna* for this purpose.

The contestants in a *mannjafnaðr* incorporate five categories of behavior through which Norse men define themselves as exemplars of *drengskapr*, the Norse code of honor:

physicality, social duties, sexual irregularity, appearance, and violation of alimentary taboos.

My analysis reveals that physicality, social duties, and sexual irregularity constitute the primary categories of masculine self-definition. Through them, we learn that Norse men were idealized for being strong, valiant, courageous warriors who acted with honor toward their kin and to others, and who did not view sexual conquests as better or equal to martial conquests.

Boasting or insulting a man's appearance points to a common medieval belief that one's physical appearance reflects the rightness or wrongness of one's actions, similar to the portrait that Dorian Gray kept in his attic.

Through my analysis of the themes and meta-themes of the verbal duels, as well as the verbal duels themselves, I find that the social conception of Norse masculinity was not fixed and inscribed in runes on stone. Each verbal duel presents two or more themes, depicted through multiple rounds wherein the content focuses on specific aspects of masculine behavior or performance (though not necessarily in the same behavioral category). From the *Morkinskinna* and the *Magnussona*, we find that debates centering on what type of actions are most honorable for a king suggest that while the practice of venturing abroad and gaining honor for oneself in battle against foreign enemies is manly, a king must consider actions that benefit his countrymen as well as garner honor for himself. The *Brennu-Njals* asks whether or not actions or words primarily define a man as manly and honorable; the saga author answers the question by arguing that both are necessary but actions must validate the words or the words are meaningless. The *Örvar-Oddr*, a heroic saga about a great hero, asks what kind of deeds are worthy of honor and of post-mortem remembrance. This saga-author articulates that valorous

deeds of great risk and honor, such as venturing into battle, alone are worthy and worth remembrance.

Through this analysis, we see that Norse masculinity, a code of behavior called *drengskapr*, is something performed before the court of public opinion. Norse men are expected to be courageous, valorous, and skilled warriors; to be dominant and in control of themselves in public situations; to act with honor toward their kin and others with whom they have social relations; to speak eloquently; and to be sexually regular. Masculinity is not inherent in an adult male by virtue of biological sex; instead, masculinity is a culturally defined performance through which certain actions are culturally gendered as being appropriate and honorable for men and, therefore, manly.

When an event, however great or slight, calls into questions a Norse man's masculinity and manliness, the practice of verbal dueling affords a culturally sanctioned arena through which he may argue that he is manly and honorable. During these adversarial interactions, men define themselves as manly and honorable through two broad strategies: the boast and the insult. Through the boast, men argue that their deeds are worthy and in line with the socially accepted but often unstated ideals of Norse masculinity. Through the insult, men argue that their opponent's deeds are unworthy and separate the opponent from the social ideals. The central argument is never whether or not the deeds or misdeeds related actually occurred but whether or not the deeds or misdeeds prove sufficient to define a male's character as manly or unmanly. Additionally, verbal duels may contain threats of violence and challenges to duels; while none of my verbal duels end in violence, these utterances underscore the combative nature of a

verbal duel and suggest that in the Norse worldview, words are important but actions prove character more definitively than words can.

My work builds off the previous literature on Norse verbal dueling performance, extending the discussion in three areas. First, examining the linguistic structure of both the dueling event and the utterances reveals both the highly patterned discursive nature of the *mannjafnaðr* contest and illuminates the strategies that a verbally dexterous combatant uses to achieve victory in this arena including syntactic parallelisms, phrase repetition for emphasis, verbal pairings, and the significance of fronting words and phrases to center them in the audience's mind. Discussions on *mannjafnaðr*, which have for decades been performed by literary scholars have noted that Norse verbal dueling was highly stylized and complex, but have neither described the linguistic and discursive facets nor suggested their centrality to this verbal performance. In analyzing the content of the boasts and insults hurled, I find that a clear hierarchy exists within the minds of the saga writers in Iceland on the importance of various actions in proving one's worth as a Norse man. When coupled with verbal dexterity, combatants find ways to present their deeds in a more powerful, eloquent manner, possibly granting victory to those whose past victories come from categories devalued relative to those of their opponents. My work presents the first systematic examination of the themes of individual *mannjafnaðr* episodes; through this avenue of linguistic and content-based analysis, I reveal the central aspects and conceptions of Norse masculinity debated by the participants. These thematic questions reveal points of inquiry into social construction of masculinity regarding specific social situations and political/social stations in life. Further research in this

area will illuminate any relationship between the theme of the *mannjafnaðr* narrative and that of the enveloping saga.

While my work broadens the knowledge we have of Norse verbal dueling and the conception of Norse masculinity, further research will help flesh out certain aspects that either I have touched on in my thesis but did not have enough data to draw a definitive conclusion or I have not incorporated into this thesis. The reason behind the silences regarding boasting of being a good family member and of one's sexual exploits and prowess, whether these categories constitute a cultural "baseline" that does not afford boasting or possibly an avoidance taboo is one such area. Broadening the study to other genres of Old Icelandic literature would further enhance our understanding of Norse masculinity and Norse verbal dueling practices. While female verbal duelists always lose in verbal duels against male opponents, discourse analysis may illuminate information about the conception of femininity in the Norse world. And while rare, examining female v. female verbal dueling would give us a more complete understanding of Norse verbal dueling and the social conceptions of gender in the Norse world.

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APPENDIX A LIST OF NORSE TERMS

Alþing: The annual general assembly of Commonwealth Iceland where the *goðar* gathered every spring to elect the Law-Speaker for his three year term, discuss major issues, and try major legal cases.

Drengskapr: The Norse code of manly honor that demanded courage, valliant action, dominance over the self and others, and proper actions taken toward all members of Norse society.

Goði: The district leaders /priest-chieftains of Commonwealth-era Iceland. The *goðar* gathered annually at the Alþing for decision-making and hearing of legal disputes. They also erected and maintained temples in pre-Christian times; after Iceland converted to Christianity, they often paid for the construction of churches in their district.

Mannjafnaðr: The specific verbal duel form where men compare themselves against each other and the code of *drengskapr*.

Senna: A Norse legal term for truth, specifically truth being contested by two or more parties.

APPENDIX B

SPEECH VERBS AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS

OLD NORSE INFINITIVE	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<i>Kveða</i>	To Sing/Recite
<i>Mæla</i>	To Proclaim (in the legal sense)
<i>Segja</i>	To Say
<i>Spyrja</i>	To Inquire
<i>Svara</i>	To Ask/Answer

APPENDIX C

UTTERANCE ANALYSIS TABLES

BOAST TO INSULT RATIO BY CATEGORY (Boast/Insult)

SAGA	PHYSICALITY	SEXUAL IRREGULARITY	SOCIAL DUTIES	APPEARANCE	TABOO VIOLATION	RATIO
<i>Brennu-Njals</i>	2/1	0/2	0/4	0/5	0/1	2/13
<i>Orvar-Odds</i>	14/6	0/3	0/0	0/0	0/0	14/9
<i>Magnussona</i>	10/3	0/2	2/2	1/0	0/0	13/7
<i>Morkinskinna</i>	4/0	0/1	13/2	0/0	0/0	17/3

UTTERANCE TOTALS

UTTERANCE CATEGORY	BOAST	INSULT	TOTAL NUMBER OF UTTERANCES	Percentage of Total
Physicality	30	10	40	51.28
Social Duties	15	8	23	29.48
Sexual Irregularity	0	8	8	10.25
Appearance	1	5	6	7.69
Taboo Violation	0	1	1	1.28
TOTALS	46	32	78	99.98
Percentage of Total	58.97	41.02		

APPENDIX D
TRANSLATIONS

MORKINSKINNA

1 It happened once that when the two brothers, King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr, were together at
2 a feast, King Sigurðr fell silent and people were unable to engage him in conversation. The host
3 was a friend of King Eysteinn's. He urged King Eysteinn to appeal to King Sigurðr

4
5 "Because, Sire, we find it difficult to frame our words him. It is true that he has
6 distinguished himself greatly and that he, as well as all his men, even if they were only
7 serving men on the expedition, think all other deeds to be of little worth. They are not
8 equaled by the wealthy landowners and your friends, Sir. They walk around in valuable
9 garments and think themselves better than many a brave man."

10
11 This seemed true to King Eysteinn,

12
13 And he proclaimed to King Sigurðr

14
15 "Brother, why are you so sad? Are you sick? If you are in full health, it befits us to
16 entertain our men."

17
18 King Sigurðr answered

19
20 "You may be as happy as you like, but leave me to my own entertainment"

21
22 King Eysteinn answered

23
24 "The decision is yours, but how can you feel disgraced by me? Are we not equal sons of
25 King Magnus? I can tell this by listening to you and seeing your appearance. What
26 seems to you to be the greatest difference between us? Tell me that."

27
28 King Sigurðr answered

29
30 "I feel no need to compare our deeds."

31
32 King Eysteinn said

33
34 "If we cannot agree, there are wise men present to judge what we say."

35
36 King Sigurðr proclaimed

37
38 "I believe, King Eysteinn, that I am the stronger man and better at swimming."
39

1 "That is true,"
2
3 King Eysteinn said
4
5 "but I am more skilled and better playing chess, and that is worth as much as your
6 strength."
7
8 King Sigurðr proclaimed
9
10 "I believe that everyone knows me to be no less skilled with weapons than you, and no
11 less good at riding in tournaments."
12
13 King Eysteinn answered
14
15 "That is true, brother. But I know that men sometimes come to us in need of having
16 their cases resolved. At those times the crowd around me is a little thicker, brother,
17 when men seek vainly from you the necessary decision."
18
19 King Sigurðr proclaimed
20
21 "Certainly, you are a wise man, King Eysteinn, and many seek you for counsel. But I hear
22 some say you sometimes promise what you cannot do and do not value greatly your
23 own word."
24
25 King Eysteinn answered
26
27 "It is true, brother, that many seek me out when I am unable to help them as much as I
28 would wish. I also judge cases for men according to the evidence. If better testimony
29 comes to light later, I give each man the benefit of justice whatever the previous
30 judgment was. However, I hear that you keep your promises, though your promises are
31 bad more often than not."
32
33 King Sigurðr proclaimed
34
35 "I traveled through Apulia to the River Jordan and did not see you there. I was
36 victorious in eight battles, and you were in none of them. I went to the Lord's tomb and
37 did not see you there. I entered the river after the example of our Lord and swam
38 across and did not see you there. I tied a knot for you that still awaits you. I took the
39 town of Sidon with the king of Jerusalem, and we had the benefit of neither your
40 support nor your counsel."
41
42 Then King Eysteinn proclaimed
43

1 “Now you hit the sore that I have thought for a long time ready to spring forth. Little
2 have I to compare with your deeds. North in Vagar I established a shelter for fishermen
3 so that poor men could have nourishment for life and aid. I also had a church built here
4 and here a parsonage and a church construction fund, where the land had been as good
5 as pagan before that. Those people will remember that King Eysteinn was in Norway.
6 I had a church built on Pardarnes and endowed it. Those people will also remember
7 that King Eysteinn was in Norway. There was a trail over the Dofra Mountains from
8 Prandheimr. Men were often exposed there and had difficult journeys. I had hospices
9 built there and endowed them. Those people will remember King Eysteinn was in
10 Norway. Off Agðanes ther was unprotected coastline and no harbor, so that many ships
11 sank. There is now constructed a harbor and good anchorages. And a church has been
12 built. Then I had signal fires built on the mountains. The people who benefited there
13 will remember that King Eysteinn was in Norway. Fishermen and merchants, who bring
14 their blessings to this land, will profit from it and the kingdom will have no lack of them.
15

16 I also had a hall built in Bjorgvin, and the Church of the Apostles and a bridge between
17 them. Later kings will remember this work. I also had St. Michael’s Church built and
18 established a monastery. I also established laws, brother, so that everyone might have
19 justice in his dealings with others. If these are maintained, the government of the land
20 will be better I have also brought Jamtaland into the kingdom – more with persuasion
21 and wisdom rather than aggression. This does not amount to much, but I am not sure
22 that it is less useful or beneficial for the people than your bludgeoning bludemen off to
23 the devil and sending them to hell.
24

25 As to your boast of good deeds when you visited the Lord’s tomb, I think that my merit was no
26 less when I jointly established a monastery and a church. And regarding the knot that you tied
27 for me, it seems to me that I could have tied you such a knot that you would never have been
28 king of Norway again. You were penniless when you left the country, and King Olafr and I
29 dowered you like our sister. You will not take over the country in such a way that I will loose
30 the knot. Now let wise men consider what you have over me. You and your highly esteemed
31 followers may realize that there are men who can equal you in Norway.”

MANGUSSONA

1 King Eystein and King Sigurðr went both in the spring to guest-quarters in the Uplands; and
2 each had a separate house, because the houses were not very distant from each other where
3 the kings should take to feast. Then the bondsmen, however, thought that both should be
4 entertained together by turns in each house; and thus they were both at first in the house
5 which King Eystein had. But in the evening, when the people took to drinking, the ale was not
6 good; so that the guests were very quiet and still.

7
8 Then said King Eystein

9
10 “Why are people silent? It is more common in drinking parties that people are merry,
11 so let us provide some entertainment over our ale, that will amuse people. Brother
12 Sigurðr, that must seem pleasing to all when we have some jolly talk.”

13
14 Sigurðr replied, bluntly

15
16 “You may be as cheerful as you wish, but let me be quit in your presence.”

17
18 Eystein said

19
20 “It is a common custom over the ale-table to compare one person with another. I wish
21 to do so now.”

22
23 Then Sigurðr was silent.

24
25 Said King Eystein

26
27 “I see that I must begin this amusement. Now I will take you, brother, to compare
28 myself with. I will make it appear so as if we had both equal reputation and equal
29 property, I may not make any difference in our birth and upbringing.”

30
31 Then King Sigurðr said:

32
33 “Don’t you remember that I was always able to throw you on your back as often as I
34 wished, although you are a year older?”

35
36 Then King Eystein replied,

37
38 “Or might I then remember that you were not so good at the games which require
39 agility.”

40
41 Then proclaimed King Sigurðr:

1 “Do you remember that when we swam together, I could drag you under water, if I
2 wanted?”
3
4 King Eystein says:
5
6 “But I could swim as far as you, and I was not a worse diver; and I could also run upon
7 snow-skates so well I know no one then who could beat me, and you could no more do
8 it than an ox.”
9
10 King Sigurðr says:
11
12 “It seems to me that it is a more useful and suitable accomplishment to know the skill
13 of using a bow; and I think you could scarcely draw my bow, even if you used your
14 foot.”
15
16 Eystein answers:
17
18 “I am not as bow-strong as you are, but there is less difference between our shooting
19 near; and I can use the skis much better than you, and in former times that was held a
20 greater accomplishment.”
21
22 King Sigurðr says:
23
24 “It appears to me much better for a king who is to be the superior of other men, that
25 he is conspicuous in a crowd, and stronger and more powerful at weapons than other
26 men; easily seen, and easily known, where there are many together.”
27
28 King Eystein says:
29
30 “It is no less a distinction that a man is of a handsome appearance, so as to be easily
31 known from others on that account; and this appears to me more noble, because the
32 best ornament is allied to beauty. Also, I know more about the law than you, and
33 whatever we should talk about, I speak more eloquently than you do.”
34
35 King Sigurðr says:
36
37 “It may be that you know more law-quirks, for I have had something else to do; neither
38 will any deny you a smooth tongue. But there are many who say that your words are
39 not to be trusted; and what you promise is little to be regarded; and that you talk just
40 according to what those who are about you say, and that is not kingly. “
41
42 King Eystein says:
43

1 "This is because, when people bring their cases before me, I wish first to give every man
2 that judgment which he desires; but afterwards another who has the case against him,
3 and then often, and now the case is brought to mediation so that both shall be
4 satisfied. It often happens, too, that I promise whatever is desired of me because I wish
5 that all may be joyful about me. I would be able, if I wanted, to do as you do, - to
6 promise evil to all; and I never hear any complaint of your not keeping this promise."
7

8 King Sigurðr says:
9

10 "Everyone speaks about the expedition that I made out of the country as a noble
11 expedition, while you in the meantime sat at home like your father's daughter."
12

13 Eystein answers:
14

15 "Now you touched the tender spot. I would not have brought up this conversation if I
16 had not known what to reply on this point. The truth of the matter is that I equipped
17 you from home like a sister, before you went upon this expedition."
18

19 Sigurðr the king says:
20

21 "You must have heard that on this expedition I was in many a battle in the Saracen's
22 land, which you must have heard of, and gained the victory in all and many kinds of
23 jewels, the like of which were never seen before in this country; and I was the most
24 respected wherever I found the most gallant men; and, I think that you have not
25 stopped home-dragging."
26

27 Eystein the king says:
28

29 "I have heard that you had several battles abroad, but it was more useful for the
30 country what I was doing in the meantime here at home: I built five churches from the
31 foundations, and a harbor out at Agdanes, where it before was impossible for any man
32 to go, and now one can go, and where vessels ply north and south along the coast. I set
33 a warping post and iron ring in the sound of Sinholm, and in Bergen I built a royal hall,
34 while you were out killing fiendish bluemen in Serkland. This, I think, was of but little
35 honor to our kingdom."
36

37 King Sigurðr says:
38

39 "On this expedition I went all the way to Jordan and swam across the river. On the bank
40 there is a bush of willows, and there I twisted a knot of willows, and said this: knot you
41 should untie, brother, or take the curse attached to it."
42

43 King Eystein says:

1 "I may not go and untie the knot which you tied for me; but if I had been tied the knot
2 for you, you would not have been king of Norway at your return to this country, when
3 with a single ship you came sailing into my fleet. "

4
5 Thereupon both were silent, and there was anger on both sides. Many more words passed
6 between the brothers, where he dragged himself to the place and sat in speech, from which it
7 appeared that each of them wished to be greater than the other; however, peace was
8 preserved between them as long as they lived.

9
10

BRENNU-NJALS

1 One day Njal and his sons had a long secret talk with Asgrim. Then Asgrim jumped to his feet
2 and proclaimed to the Njalssons:

3
4 "Let us go and find ourselves some friends, lest we be outnumbered in court; for this
5 case will be a hard-fought one."
6

7 Asgrim went out, followed by Helgi Njalsson, then Kari Solmundarson, then Grim Njalsson, then
8 Skarp-heðinn, then Thorhall Asgrimsson, then Thorgrim the Mighty, and then Thorleif Crow.
9

10 They went to the booth of Gizur the White and walked inside. Gizur stood up to welcome them
11 and invited them to sit and drink.
12

13 Said Asgrim:

14
15 "This is no time for that and no time for mumbling either. What help can I expect from
16 you, because you are my kinsman?"
17

18 Replied Gizur:

19
20 "My sister Jorunn would expect me not to shrink from helping you. You and I shall stand
21 side by side, now and always."
22

23 Asgrim thanked him and went outside then.
24

25 Asked Skarp-heðinn:

26
27 "Where shall we go now?"
28

29 Asgrim answered:

30
31 "To the booth of the Olfus men."
32

33 They went there. Asgrim asked if Skapti Thoroddsson were in the booth. He was told that he
34 was there. They went into the booth.
35

36 Skapti was sitting on the dais and welcomed Asgrim. He received this well. Skapti invited
37 Asgrim to sit beside him.
38

39 Asgrim replied that he did not mean to stay long:

40
41 "But for a reason I have come to see you."
42

1 Said Skapti:
2
3 "Let us hear that."
4
5 "I need your help,"
6
7 Said Asgrim,
8
9 "for myself and my kinsmen."
10
11 "I have no intention,"
12
13 Said Skapti,
14
15 "of letting your troubles into my house."
16
17 Asgrim said:
18
19 These are mean words, and you are of least use when the need is greatest.
20
21 "Who is that man,"
22
23 Said Skapti,
24
25 "the fifth man in the line, that tall and fierce-looking man, with the ill-starred, pale, and
26 trollish look?"
27
28 He (Skarp-heðinn) replied:
29
30 "Skarp-heðinn is my name, and you have often seen me at the Althing but I must be
31 smarter than you, for I have no need to ask you your name. You are called Skapti
32 Thoroddsson, but once you called yourself Bristle-Head, when you had just killed Ketil of
33 Elda. That was the time you shaved your head and smeared it with tar, then you paid
34 some slaves to raise up some turf and you crept beneath it for the night. Later you fled
35 to Thorolf Loptsson of Eyrar, and took you in and then smuggled you out in his flour
36 sacks."
37
38 With that the Asgrim contingent left the booth.
39
40 Skarp-heðinn proclaimed:
41
42 "Where shall we go now?"
43
44 "To Snorri Goði's booth,"

1 Said Asgrim.
2
3 Then they went to Snorri's booth. There was a man outside in front of the booth. Asgrim asked
4 if Snorri were in the booth. He was told that he was there. Asgrim walked into the booth,
5 followed by the others.
6
7 Snorri was sitting on the dais. Asgrim went up to him and greeted him well; Snorri welcomed
8 him cordially and invited him to sit.
9
10 Asgrim said that he did not mean to stay long:
11
12 "But for a reason I have come to see you."
13
14 Snorri asked him to state that.
15
16 Said Asgrim:
17
18 "I would like you to come to court with me, and give me your support, for you are a
19 clever and very resourceful man."
20
21 Snorri replied:
22
23 "Our own lawsuits are going badly just now, and we are under strong pressure from
24 many of our opponents; and for that reason we are reluctant to shoulder the trouble of
25 men in other Quarters."
26
27 Said Asgrim:
28
29 "That is not unreasonable, for you owe us nothing."
30
31 "I know that you are a good man,"
32
33 Said Snorri:
34
35 "and I can promise that I shall neither take sides against you nor give support to your
36 enemies."
37
38 Asgrim thanked him.
39
40 Snorri proclaimed:
41
42 "Who is that man, fifth in the line, the pale, sharp-featured man smirking with his teeth
43 showing and an axe on his shoulder?"
44

1 “My name is Hedin,”
2
3 He replied,
4
5 “but some call me Skarp-heðinn in full. Have you anything else to say to me?”
6
7 Snorri proclaimed:
8
9 “I think you look very ruthless and formidable, but my guess is that you have exhausted
10 your store of good luck, and that you have not long to live.”
11
12 Said Skarp-heðinn:
13
14 “Well and good, for that is a debt we all have to pay. However, it is more necessary for
15 you to avenge your father than to make such prophecies about me.”
16
17 “Many have said that before,”
18
19 Said Snorri:
20
21 “and it cannot make me angry.”
22
23 With that they went out, and got no promise of support.
24
25 They made their way to the booth of the men from Skagafjord. Haf the Wealthy owned the
26 booth. He was the son of Thorkell, the son of Eirik from Goddales, the son of Geirmund, the
27 son of Hroald, the son of Eirik Stiff-Beard, who killed Grjotgard in Soknardale in Norway. Half
28 the Wealthy’s mother was named Thorunn, and was the daughter of Asbjorn the Bald of Myrk-
29 river, the son of Hrossbjorn.
30
31 The Asgrim contingent walked inside the booth. Haf was sitting in the centre of the booth and
32 was talking to someone. Asgrim went up to him and greeted him. Haf welcomed him and
33 invited him to sit.
34
35 Asgrim proclaimed:
36
37 “I wish to ask your help for myself and my kinsmen.”
38
39 Haf answered quickly and said that he did not want to have a part in their troubles:
40
41 “And yet I would like to know who that pale-faced man is, who is fifth in the line, and
42 who looks ugly enough to have come straight out of some sea-cliff?”
43
44 Skarp-heðinn replied:

1
2 "Never mind that, you milksop; I would dare to face you anywhere, and it would not
3 frighten me in the least though there were more than one of your sort in my path. And
4 you would be better employed to seek back your sister Svanlaug, whom Eydis Iron-
5 Sword and Anvil-Head kidnapped from your home and you had not the courage to win
6 her."

7
8 Asgrim proclaimed:

9
10 "Let us go. There is no support here."

11
12 From there they walked to the Modruvellir's booth, and asked if Gudmund the Powerful were
13 in, and they were told that he was there, and they went inside the booth. There was a high-
14 seat in the middle of the booth, and Gudmund the Powerful was sitting on it. Asgrim went up
15 to Gudmund and greeted him. Gudmund welcomed him and invited him to sit.

16
17 Asgrim proclaimed:

18
19 "I do not wish to sit, but I want to ask for your help, for you are an enterprising and
20 powerful chieftain."

21
22 Gudmund proclaimed:

23
24 "I will certainly not be against you. But if I feel like giving you some help, we can easily
25 discuss that later."

26
27 And he was well disposed towards them. Asgrim thanked him for his words.

28
29 Gudmund proclaimed:

30
31 "There is one man in your group that I have been looking at for some time. He seems to
32 me unlike most other men I have ever seen."

33
34 "Which one is that?"

35
36 Asked Asgrim.

37
38
39 "He is fifth in the line,"

40
41 Said Gudmund,

1 “chestnut-haired and pale-faced, huge and powerful, and so clearly fit for manly deeds
2 that I would rather have him in my following than ten others. But he is an unlucky
3 man.”

4
5 Skarp-heðinn proclaimed:

6
7 “I know you are talking about me. But we walk an unlucky path, each in his own way. I
8 stand condemned, as is only right, for the killing of Hoskuldr Hvitaness-goði; but you
9 have been condemned by Thorkell Foul-Mouth and Thorir Helgason, and you have
10 greatest slander from them.”

11
12 With that they went out.

13
14 Skarp-heðinn proclaimed then:

15
16 “Where shall we go now?”

17
18 “To the Ljosawater’s booth,”

19
20 Said Asgrim.

21
22 Thorkell Foul-Mouth had set up that booth. He was the son of Thorgeir-goði of Ljosawater, the
23 son of Tjorvi, the son of Thorkell Long; and Thorgeir’s mother was Thorunn, the daughter of
24 Thorstein, the son of Sigmund, the son of Gnupa-Bard. Thorkell Foul-Mouth’s mother was
25 Gudrid. She was the daughter of Thorkell the Black from Hleidrargard, the son of Thorir the
26 Castrated the son of Keil Seal, the son of Ornolf, the son of Bjornolf, the son of Grim Hairy-
27 Cheek, the son of Ketil Trout, the son of Hallbjorn Half-Troll.

28
29 Thorkell Foul-Mouth had ventured abroad and achieved victory in other lands. He had killed a
30 robber east in Jamtland Forest. Afterwards he travelled east to Sweden, where he joined forces
31 with Sorkvir the Old, and harried in the eastern Baltic. It was Thorkell’s turn to fetch water for
32 the crew. There he encountered a fabulous monster and it was long and hard between them
33 before he could kill the monster. From there he traveled east of Bálagarðssíðu where Thorkell
34 had the task of getting water, he killed a flying dragon. After that he returned to Sweden, then
35 to Norway, and then to Iceland and he had these feats carved above his bed-closet and on a
36 chair in front of his high-seat.

37
38 He and his brothers also fought against Gudmund the Powerful at the Ljosawater Assembly,
39 and the Ljosawater men won the day; it was on that occasion that Thorkell Foul-Mouth and
40 Thorir Helgason had slandered Gudmund.

41
42 Thorkell claimed that there was on one in Iceland whom he would not dare to meet in single
43 combat or before whom he would yield ground. He was from thenceforth called Thorkell Foul-
44 Mouth because no one with whom he had to deal escaped the weight of his tongue or his arm.

1
2 Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson and the others went to Thorkell Foul-Mouth's booth.

3
4 Asgrim proclaimed to his followers,

5
6 "This booth belongs to Thorkell Foul-Mouth, a great warrior, and it would make a big
7 difference to us if we got his help. We must handle this extremely carefully, for he is a
8 stubborn and difficult man. I must ask you, Skarp-heðinn, to stay out of the
9 conversation."

10
11 Skarp-heðinn smirked. He was wearing a blue tunic. He had a silver belt around him, blue-
12 striped trousers, and black top-boots. He was carrying a small round shield and the axe in hand
13 with which he had killed Thrain and which he called *Battle-Ogre*. His hair was combed back and
14 held in place by a silk headband. He looked the consummate warrior, and everyone knew him
15 at first sight even if they had never before seen him. He kept exactly to his position in the line
16 neither pushing forward nor back.

17
18 Now they entered the booth and went up to the inner part. Thorkell sat in the center of the
19 dais, with his men arranged alongside him. Asgrim greeted him. Thorkell welcomed him

20
21 Asgrim proclaimed to him,

22
23 "The reason we have come here is to ask if you will come to court to support us."

24
25 Thorkell proclaimed:

26
27 "Why should you need my help, when you have already been to Gudmund? Surely he
28 promised you some help."

29
30 "We got no help from him,"

31
32 Said Asgrim.

33
34 Thorkell proclaimed,

35
36 "Then Gudmund must have thought your cause very unpopular. And he was right, for it
37 was a hideous crime. Now I see what brought you here: you thought that I would be
38 less particular than Gudmund and prepared to back an unjust cause."

39
40 Asgrim fell silent and thought things were going badly.

41
42 Thorkell proclaimed,

43

1 “Who is that big sinister man, fifth in the line, the one with the pale, sharp, unlucky, ugly
2 look?”
3
4 Skarp-heðinn proclaimed,
5
6 “I am called Skarp-heðinn, and you have no cause to mock me, an innocent man, with
7 your insults. I at least have never threatened my own father’s life as you have, nor have
8 I ever fought with has you did with your father. You have rarely ridden to the Althing or
9 worked on lawsuits, and it must be easier for you to milk cows than to sit here at the
10 Oxara River in isolation. You should clean the sausage from your teeth you sucked out
11 of a mare’s ass before you came here – your shepherd saw you at it, and was appalled
12 at such disgusting behavior.”
13
14 Then Thorkell sprang to his feet in great anger and grabbed his short-sword and proclaimed,
15
16 “This is the sword I got in Sweden and I killed a great warrior to get it, and since then I
17 have used it to kill many more. And when I get to you I shall run you through with it and
18 pay you back for your obscene words.”
19
20 Skarp-heðinn stood there with his axe raised and smirked and proclaimed:
21
22 “This is the axe I carried when I leapt twelve ells [18 feet] across the Markar River and
23 killed Thrain Sigfusson while eight men stood by and could not touch me. And I have
24 never raised a weapon against anyone and missed my mark.”
25
26 He burst past his brothers and his kinsman Kari and charged up to Thorkell.
27
28 Skarp-heðinn proclaimed then,
29
30 “And now, Thorkell Foul-Mouth, sheath your sword and sit down, or I shall drive my axe
31 into your head and cleave your skull to your shoulders.”
32
33 Thorkell sheathed his sword and sat down promptly. It was the only time either before or after
34 that such a thing happened to him.
35
36 Asgrim and the others walked out of the booth.
37
38 Skarp-heðinn proclaimed,
39
40 “Where shall we go now?”
41
42 “Home to our booth,”
43
44 Answered Asgrim.

1
2 "Then we went on our begging-path in vain,"
3
4 Said Skarp-heðinn.
5
6 Asgrim turned to him and proclaimed:
7
8 "You were rather too ready with your tongue in some places, but where Thorkell was
9 concerned, I think you gave him just what he deserved."
10
11 They then returned to their booth and told Njal everything that had happened.
12
13 He said,
14
15 "Let fate take its own course, whatever it will."
16
17 Gudmund the Powerful now discovered how things had gone with Skarp-and Thorkell and said
18 this,
19
20 "You all know how things went between us and the Ljosawater men; but I never
21 suffered anything like the shame and humiliation at their hands that Thorkell did from
22 Skarp-heðinn, and that was excellently done."
23
24 Then spoke Gudmund to his brother Einar Thveraeing,
25
26 "Take all my men and give your support to the Njalssons when the court convenes, and
27 if they need any help next summer, I will support them myself."
28
29 Einar agreed and sent word to Asgrim.
30
31 Said Asgrim:
32
33 There are not many *goðar* like Gudmund.
34
35 Then he told Njal.
36

ORVAR-ODDR

1 There was a man called Harek staying with the king, held in high honor. He was an old man and
2 had fostered the king's daughter, and the king used to talk over this mystery with him. Harek
3 told him that he didn't know the answer but thought it likely that this man came from a noble
4 family.

5
6 One evening after the king had retired, Sjolff and Sigurðr went down to the brothers with two
7 drinking horns, and they drank from them.

8
9 Then Sjolff said these words

10
11 "Is Odd the Great asleep?"

12
13 "Yes,"

14
15 They said,

16
17 "and it makes a lot more sense than drinking yourself silly like we were doing."

18
19 [Sjolff]

20
21 "It could be that he's had more practice at lying out among the trees and lakes than
22 drinking with respectable people. A great drinker is he?"

23
24 "Yes,"

25
26 They said.

27
28 "Would he be a greater drinker than the two of us together?"

29
30 Said Sjolff.

31
32 "We think that,"

33
34 Said Ottar,

35
36 "he could drink a lot more."

37
38 "We'll have a bet on it,"

39
40 Said Sjolff,

41
42 "We may lay against your ring, which is worth twelve coins, and that shall lie against

1 your two heads.”
2
3 They made a binding agreement about this just as before. In the morning Odd asked (the
4 brothers) what they’d been discussing and they told him.
5
6 “Now you have made a really stupid bet,”
7
8 Said Odd,
9
10 “Risking your own heads is adding a lot to the previous stakes. I’m not at all sure I can
11 hold all that much more than other men, though I am a lot bigger than they are. Still, I
12 will go to the drinking match and take them on.”
13
14 The king was told that he should go to the drinking contest, and the king’s daughter and Harek,
15 her foster-father, were to sit here with him. Sigurðr and Sjölf went up to Odd.
16
17 Here’s a horn.
18
19 Said Sigurðr, and then he sang this verse
20
21
22 Odd, you have never split
23 Mail-coats in battle,
24 When the helmed warriors,
25 Took to their heels;
26 The war was raging,
27 Fire raced through the town,
28 When over the Wends
29 Our king won victory.
30
31 Sjölf gave him another horn and asked him to drink up. He sang this verse
32
33 You were not there, Odd
34 At the clash of weapons
35 When we let the great king’s
36 Men die.
37 From there I brought home
38 Six and eight wounds,
39 While you were out begging
40 Food from the farmers.
41
42 Then they went back to their seats. Odd rose to his feet and went before Sigurðr and brought
43 with him a horn and another one to Sjölf.
44

1 He sang one verse to each of them before he went away.
2
3 Now you shall hear
4 My praise-song,
5 Sigurðr and Sjolfr,
6 Seat-warmers.
7 Time to repay you
8 For a slanderous work
9 of hard-twisted praise,
10 two heartless ones.
11
12 You, Sjolfr, lay
13 On the kitchen floor,
14 And are without
15 Daring deeds
16 And courageous resolve
17 But I took life from four men
18 Outside of Aquitaine.
19
20 They drained their horns, and Odd went back to his seat. Then Sigurðr and Sjolfr went over to
21 him again, and Sjolfr gave him a horn and sang this verse
22
23 You, Odd, have ventured
24 With the idiots
25 Taking morsels
26 From the table.
27 But I, on my own,
28 Bore back in my hands
29 My hacked shield
30 From Ulfsfell.
31
32 Sigurðr brought him another horn, and said
33
34 Odd, you weren't
35 With the Greeks,
36 When we reddened our swords
37 On the Saracens;
38 We made the harsh
39 Music of steel,
40 They fell, the warriors,
41 In the battle.
42
43 Odd drained the horns, and they went back to their seats. Then Odd stood up and went with a
44 horn to each of them, and said this

1
2 You gossiped
3 With young girls, Sjolfr
4 While we sent flames playing
5 Through the homestead.
6 The hard man,
7 Lord Hadding we defeated;
8 Old age
9 Is denied to Olvir.
10
11 You, Sigurðr, were
12 Under the linens with young girls
13 While with the Bjarma
14 We clashed in battle,
15 And sat at the table twice,
16 Keen as a hawk.
17 And you, man,
18 Slept under the linen.
19
20 Then Odd went back to his seat and drained the horns. Everybody thought this great
21 entertainment and was giving it a good hearing. Next, Sigurðr and Sjolfr went up to Odd and
22 gave him a horn.
23
24 Then Sjolfr said
25
26 Odd, you were not
27 On Atalsfell
28 When we won
29 Shining gold.
30 The berserks,
31 We bound them,
32 There was a champion
33 of the king's host slain.
34
35 Then Odd drained the horns and they sat down. Odd brought them a horn and said
36
37 Sjolfr, you were not
38 There when we
39 Watched the mail-coats
40 Washing in blood.
41 Spear-points explored
42 In the ring-mail;
43 While you would rather get to know
44 The king's hall.

1
 2 Sigurðr, you were not
 3 Present when we
 4 Cleared six high-decked ships
 5 Off Hauksness;
 6 And you were not around
 7 In the west with Skolla,
 8 It was there
 9 We took the life of the Angles.
 10
 11 Now Odd sat down, and they brought him the horn, but with no poetry this time. He drank up,
 12 and they sat down.
 13
 14 And now Odd brought them a horn and said
 15
 16 Sjolf, you were not there
 17 When we reddened pointed swords
 18 On the Earl from Læso.
 19 And you, sex-mad,
 20 Sat at home,
 21 Considering
 22 The calf or the slave girl.
 23
 24 Sigurðr, you were not
 25 At Zealand when I felled
 26 The battle-hardened brothers
 27 Brand and Agnar,
 28 Asmund, Ingjald,
 29 And Alf was the fifth of them.
 30 But you, lay at home
 31 In the king's hall,
 32 False-story-teller,
 33 Captive coward.
 34
 35 Then he went back to his seat, and they stood up and brought him the drinking horns. Odd
 36 finished them both off. Then he brought them a horn,
 37
 38 And said
 39
 40 Sjolf, you were not there,
 41 South at Skien
 42 When the kings
 43 Crushed helms;
 44 We waded ankle-deep in blood.

1 I slew men.
 2 You were not there.
 3
 4 Sigurðr, you were not there,
 5 At Svía Skerries,
 6 Where with Halfdan
 7 We repaid the feud;
 8 We repaid his slander.
 9 Swords carved
 10 War-seasoned shields
 11 And he fell dead.
 12
 13 Now Odd sat down himself, and they brought him horns, and he drank up, and they went back
 14 to their seats. Then Odd brought them a horn,
 15
 16 And said
 17
 18 We sailed our ship
 19 Through Elfar Sound,
 20 Contented, carefree,
 21 To Tronu Creeks,
 22 Where Ogmund lay,
 23 Eythjof's-bane,
 24 Slow to flee,
 25 In two ships.
 26
 27 We battered the shields
 28 With hard stones,
 29 With sharp swords
 30 We hewed them.
 31 Three on our side survived,
 32 Nine on theirs.
 33 Captive fool,
 34 Why are you not talking now?
 35
 36 Then Odd went to his seat and they brought him two horns. He drained these down, then
 37 offered them two more,
 38
 39 And said
 40
 41 Sigurðr, you were not
 42 On Samso Isle
 43 When I traded blows
 44 With Hjórvall;

1 We were two,
2 And they twelve altogether.
3 I had the victory,
4 While you sat silent.

5
6 I went across Gotaland
7 Grim at heart
8 For seven days altogether
9 Until I met Sæmund.
10 Before I departed
11 I took eighteen of their lives,
12 While you, little clown,
13 Reeled your way
14 Late through the night
15 To the slave girl's bed.

16
17 There was loud cheering in the hall when Odd had spoken this, and they drained their horns
18 and Odd sat down. The king's men couldn't get enough of this entertainment. Then they
19 brought Odd two more horns, and he finished them in no time. After that he stood up, went up
20 to them and saw immediately that the drink had completely defeated them, and that poetry
21 was beyond them. He gave them the horns and said

22
23 Nowhere will you
24 Be deemed worthy,
25 Sigurðr and Sjölf.
26 Company for a king.
27 But I bear in mind
28 Hjalmar the Brave-hearted,
29 Who wielded his sword
30 More deftly than any.

31
32 Thord advanced fiercely
33 To each fight between us,
34 No armor,
35 Never a shield;
36 And he laid low to earth
37 The brave king Halfdan
38 And all his companions.

39
40 I was with Asmund
41 In our childhood
42 Foster-brothers together,
43 Both always.
44 Many times I bore

1 A war-like shaft
 2 When kings clashed in war.
 3
 4 I have battled the Saxons and maimed the Swedes ,
 5 The Irish, the English,
 6 And, once, the Scots;
 7 Against Frisians, and Franks,
 8 And against Flemings.
 9 To all these people,
 10 I have been a trial of strength.
 11
 12 Now I have listed them,
 13 The glorious warriors
 14 Who once followed me;
 15 We will never
 16 Again see in truth
 17 Fierce chargers in the battle.
 18
 19 Now I have listed
 20 All the exploits
 21 We performed so long ago;
 22 We returned home
 23 To the high seat.
 24 Rich in victories
 25 Let Sjolf now speak!
 26
 27 After that, Odd returned to his seat, and the brothers collapsed and fell into sleep, and had
 28 nothing more to do with the drinking, although Odd drank for a long time and after that
 29 everyone lay down and slept through the night.
 30
 31 In the morning, by the time the king had come to the great hall, Odd and his companions were
 32 already outside. He went down to one of the lakes to wash himself. His brothers noticed that
 33 the bark cuff on one sleeve was torn. Underneath there was a red sleeve and a gold bracelet
 34 on the arm, not at all slender, and then they tore all the bark off him. He didn't try to stop
 35 them. Under the bark he was wearing a red tunic of expensive fabric, trimmed in lace; his hair
 36 fell down to his shoulders. He had a gold headband encircling his forehead, and he looked
 37 more handsome than all men anywhere.
 38
 39 They took him by the hand and led him into the hall toward the king's high-seat, and said
 40
 41 It looks as if we haven't entirely appreciated who it is we have been entertaining here
 42 this winter.
 43
 44 Said the king

1
2 That could be. But who is this man who's been hiding [his identity] from us.
3
4 [Odd said]
5
6 I still call myself Odd, as I told you a while ago, the son of Grim Hairy-Cheek from the
7 north of Norway
8
9 [The king said]
10
11 Are you that Odd who went to Permia a long time ago?
12
13 [Odd]
14
15 That's the one. Who went there.
16
17 [The King]
18
19 It's no wonder that my leading men fared badly against you at games.
20
21 Now the king stood up and welcomed Odd and invited him to sit on the high-seat beside him.
22
23 [Said Odd]
24
25 I may not take your offer unless we go together as comrades.
26
27 Now it is said that they moved their seats and Odd sat next to the king, while Harek moved to a
28 chair in front of the king. The king heaped such great honors upon Odd that no man might have
29 more than he.

VITA

It all began with *Beowulf* and *Gilgamesh*. Jonathan Broussard's father read these ancient tales to him as bedtime stories. Among the others were *La Morte D'Artur*, *Hamlet*, and "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." From his early days, he developed a love for stories, specifically heroic narratives, that has persisted to this day. As a child, he continued reading Arthurian romances as well as translations of myths, epics, and legends. Other heroic narratives entered his world as well. These were heroes of legends told in popular culture: the fiction of Professor Tolkien, Batman, Spider Man, Iron Man, the Marvel interpretation of Thor, and Luke Skywalker.

Regardless of the genre, Mr. Broussard believed, and still believes, that all stories have meanings. Some meanings may be personal. Some may be to convey simple information. Some may be great metaphors for life, for the process of maturing, or to answer questions such as, "Why are we *here*?" But all stories have meaning, and he has a passion devoted to searching for those meanings.

To truly understand a story requires knowing the language and linguistic structure of its original tellings. To accomplish that, Mr. Broussard learned a variety of languages so that he could better and more directly interpret the stories he studied. The languages he learned were French, Latin, Greek, Old English, and Old Norse. He also studied linguistics and poetics in order to better understand the interrelationship of grammar, utterances, rhetoric, and narrative discourse.

Mr. Broussard has already obtained a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts degree in English from McNeese State University. This thesis completes the requirements for his second Master of Arts degree: Anthropology. After graduation in December of 2010, he will continue his

education by earning his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Communication Studies, focusing on rhetoric.